



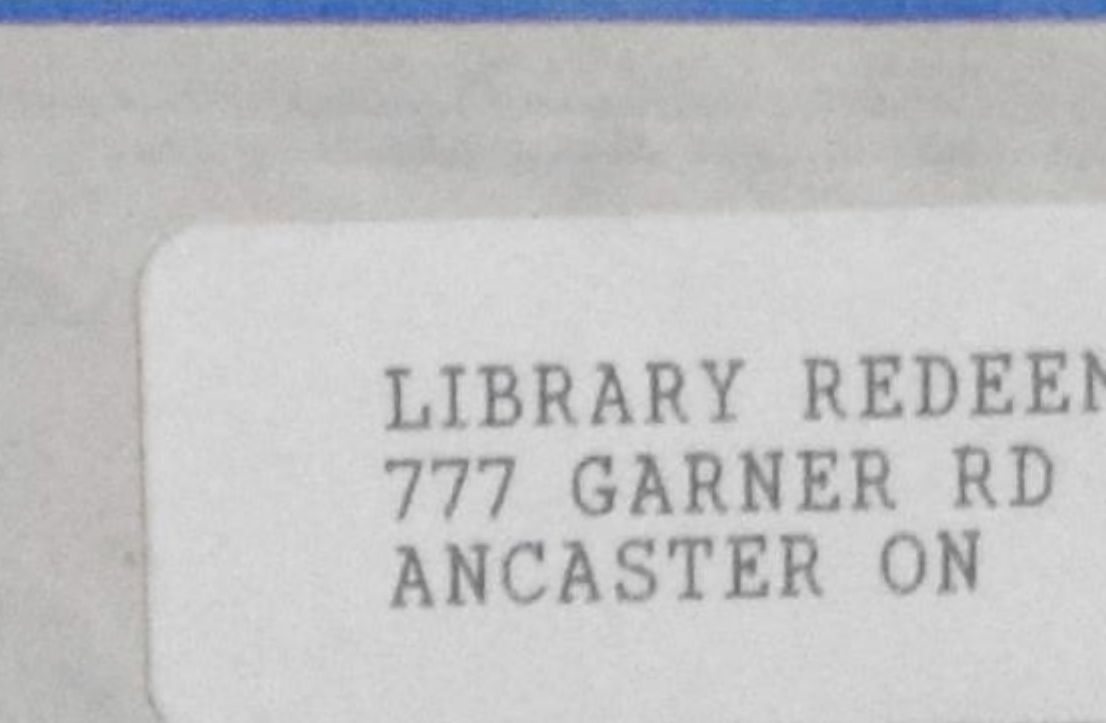
Forgo
PAGE 4



RedProCom
PAGE 8



War of 1812
PAGE 10



Restorative justice in action
PAGE 20

Dec12

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Is Canada's ethical climate changing? Churches enter pipeline debate

Will Braun

As the battle over the proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline plays out, two key questions about the moral make-up of Canada will be answered: First, will we as a nation respond to climate change with a renewed commitment to conventional energy and conventional economic growth?

And secondly, will large companies be allowed to bulldoze through unceded Aboriginal territory without local consent?

If built, the 1,177-kilometre Northern Gateway Pipeline would carry 525,000 barrels a day of bitumen from the Alberta oil sands through the territory of dozens of First Nations to the B.C. coast

where it would be loaded onto supertankers headed mostly for Asia. Calgary-based Enbridge is the lead proponent of the \$5.5-billion project.

Churches are slowly entering the debate. Katy Quinn of Kairos — a social justice organization representing seven of Canada's largest denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church in North America — says the issue is a "game changer" in terms of its implications for ecological sustainability and indigenous rights. She says the issue will be a major focus for Kairos.

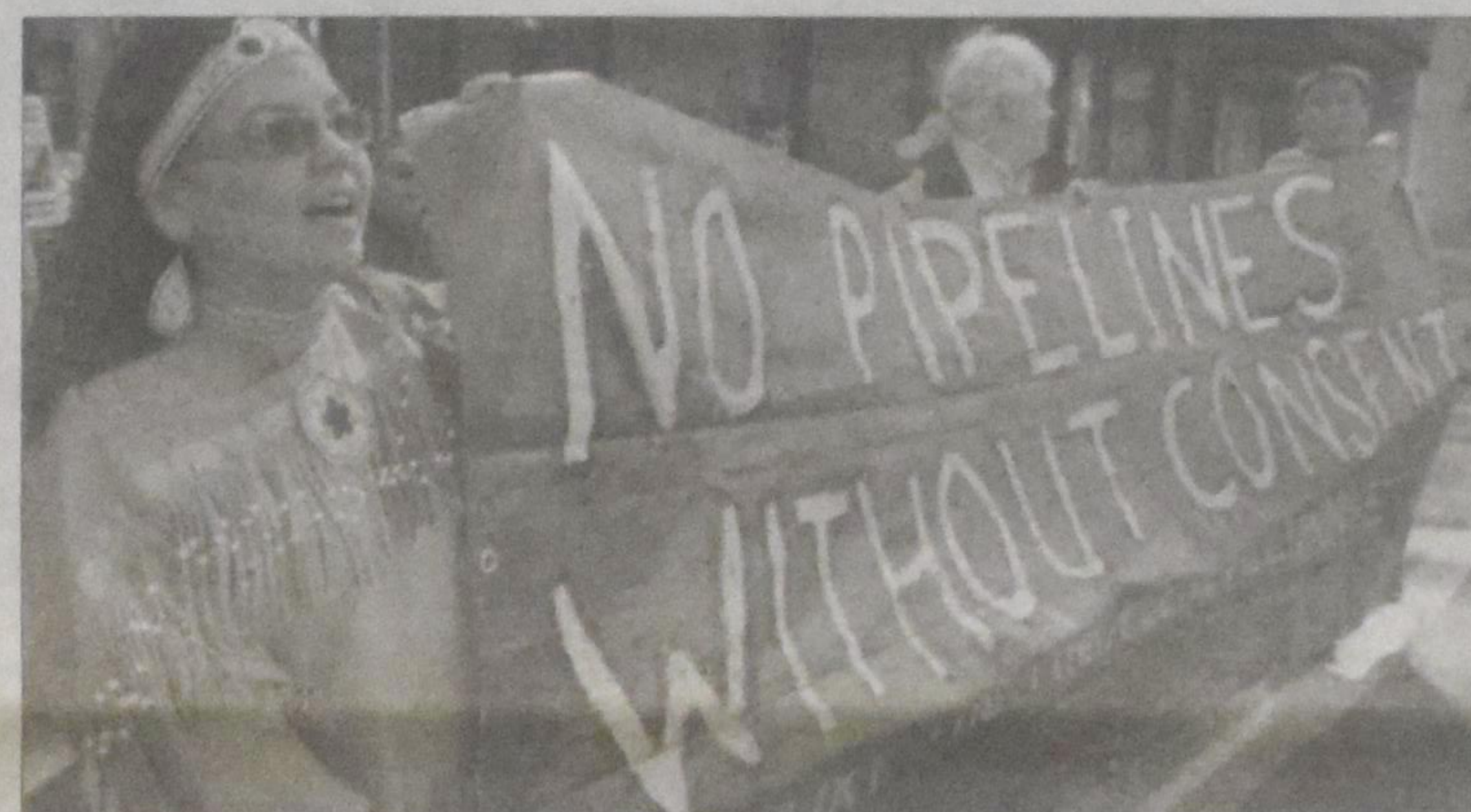
As for involvement beyond that of Kairos, Quinn says churches are keeping a "fairly low profile."

Unwavering resolve

The Harper government is fervently committed to the project. Federal officials have famously branded opponents of the pipeline "radicals" and recent changes to environmental laws are seen by many as a response, in part, to opponents of the Northern Gateway project.

Like the feds, Enbridge spokesman Todd Nogier emphasizes the economic benefits of the project. Speaking by phone from Calgary, he says the project will boost national GDP by an estimated \$270 billion and create \$2.6 billion in tax revenues over 30 years.

On the other side, Aboriginal resistance to the project has grown



Native protesters oppose the Northern Gateway Pipeline.

beyond anything seen in Canada for years.

"I'll stand in front of a bulldozer if that's what it takes," says Chief Jackie Thomas of the Saik'uz First Nation. She's not speaking metaphorically. And she's not alone. A delegation of 40 people from the Yinka Dene Alliance — which in-

cludes Saik'uz and five other First Nations — took the train to Toronto for the Enbridge AGM on May 9, stopping along the way for rallies.

The Yinka Dene are joined by the Coastal First Nations, a coalition of 10 Aboriginal groups on the B.C. Coast who oppose the project.

See **Ethical climate** on p.2

Summer bliss: Mulcair and Canadian energy politics

Mike Wevers

Fresh from his victory in the NDP leadership race earlier this spring and invigorated with the sense of importance this provided to jump to the national stage, Thomas Mulcair set his sights on attacking the federal government's support for Alberta's oilsands development. In his attack, he supposedly took direct aim at Prime Minister Harper, but created a significant amount of collateral damage by dismiss-



As Canadians enjoy one of the hottest summers on record, Mulcair is enjoying poll results that see his NDP challenging the Harper Conservatives.

ing the western premiers as "messengers" of the Prime Minister. It appeared that in grooming himself

Mulcair's rise in Quebec

Thomas Mulcair can be easily criticized as being divisive, but a more positive spin is that he is principled. He demonstrated this in his departure from the Quebec Liberal government under Jean Charest. He disagreed with a proposal to enable private development within in a provincial park while he was Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks. Instead of accepting a different portfolio appointment, which many sitting Ministers would do to stay at the seat

of power, he voluntarily resigned from cabinet in 2006. He subsequently won a federal by-election in 2007 in a Montreal riding to become the NDP's lone Quebec Member of Parliament. Accordingly, he can take some credit in giving impetus to Jack Layton's "orange wave" which saw the NDP take 58 of Quebec's 75 seats in the 2011 federal election.

Mulcair's rise to power in party politics in the NDP leadership campaign saw him take on the party insiders' selected heir apparent, Brian Topp, past president of the party. Even though Ed Broadbent intervened in the last week of the campaign to promote Topp, Mulcair won with a

slim majority on the final ballot of the divisive campaign. Although Mulcair often points out that the majority of Canadians do not support the Harper government, with the federal Conservatives having received only 40 percent of the vote, Mulcair's margin of victory of some 57 percent on the final ballot and only 30 percent on the first ballot indicates he now leads a somewhat divided party.

Canada catching the 'Dutch Disease'

Possibly to consolidate his power base in central Canada (i.e., Ontario and Quebec) and appease his union supporters there who were

See **Summer bliss** on p.2

News

Ethical climate *continued*

Dozens of other First Nations throughout B.C. have signed a declaration in opposition to the pipeline.

Meanwhile, other First Nations have accepted Enbridge's offer of construction contracts and a chance to purchase a combined 10 percent share in the project, something that could net them up to \$300 million collectively over 30 years. According to Nogier, about half of the 40 to 50 First Nations and Aboriginal communities along the corridor are in favour of the project. But that leaves many who are not.

Risks

The primary concerns of opponents are that it would facilitate expansion of the oil sands, that oil spills could ruin some of the hundreds of rivers and streams the pipeline would cross, and that a shipping accident in the narrow channels leading from the terminus of the pipeline in Kitimat out to the open seas could destroy marine habitat over a huge area.

"Knowing the risks that it involves, we have to say no," said Gerald Amos at a February presentation in Winnipeg. Amos is an elder who speaks for the Coastal First Nations. He lives down the road from where the supertankers would dock.

Nogier says Enbridge has "complete confidence" that the project can be built and operated "very safely and sustainably." But a recent U.S. Government report slammed the company for its mishandling of a major 2010 spill from a Michigan pipeline. In response, the company announced \$500 million worth of additional safety features to the Gateway project.

Unresolved issues

Enbridge hopes to begin construction in 2014, but many issues must be addressed first; most notably, Aboriginal rights. Many of the First Nations along the B.C. portion of the corridor have never signed treaties or otherwise ceded rights to their lands. These rights are recognized in the Constitution and international law.

"It will end up in the Supreme Court," Chief Thomas says by phone from Northern B.C. That would take years.

Summer bliss *continued*

hard hit by some industry slow downs, Mulcair lashed out at a federal economic policy that results in a strong Canadian dollar. Mulcair pointed out that Canada's situation is akin to that problem faced by the Netherlands in the 1960s. Some economists, who coined it as the "Dutch Disease," attributed some of the Netherlands de-industrialization at that time to a huge natural gas development in the North Sea, which strengthened the Dutch guilder, making the country's manufactured goods uncompetitive in export markets. And the culprit in Canada's case, according to Mulcair, is primarily Alberta's oilsands. Many economists don't



An oil spill or shipping accident in Kitimat Inlet could be devastating to the region's ecosystem.

Nogier says Enbridge is committed to seeking the consent of all Aboriginal groups along the corridor, but he acknowledges that unanimous approval is unlikely.

When asked if there is anything Enbridge could do to make the project acceptable to her, Chief Thomas doesn't hesitate.

"No," she says.

The stated policy of Enbridge is to "recognize the legal and constitutional rights possessed by Aboriginal Peoples," but how might that play out?

"I don't think any one entity has a veto," Nogier says. But he adds that it is federal leaders, not Enbridge, who will ultimately need to decide "what level of First Nations' support they would like to see" before granting approvals. If cabinet approves the pipeline despite Aboriginal opposition, Nogier says it would be up to the board of Enbridge to decide whether to go ahead.

Churches cautious

In the '70s, churches played a prominent role in helping indigenous people stop another pipeline further north in the Mackenzie Valley. Church involvement this time is still in early stages.

Last March, Katy Quinn of Kairos travelled to B.C. to attend public hearings into

the project, and Kairos is sending someone to meet with Aboriginal communities along the route this August to explore possibilities of further involvement. It recently released an "Ethical Reflections" document on the issue.

Aside from Kairos, the Anglican bishops of B.C. and the Yukon issued a statement calling for a robust public review process, and the issue will be raised at the United Church national meeting in August.

The CRC, for its part, is committed to "work with Indigenous, ecumenical and civil society partners and local churches to encourage sound, inclusive and civil public dialogue on the Northern Gateway pipeline." Mike Hogeterp, who is with the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, says, "we support meaningful consultation with all affected communities and full respect for Indigenous rights to self-determination."

Complexion of a country

Nogier believes Northern Gateway is about more than a single pipeline. He sees it as "a nation-building project similar to other nation-building projects in Canada's history." He says that when Yinka Dene representatives expressed their opposition at the Enbridge AGM in May, CEO Pat Daniel

"pleaded with them that this project is very important to the country."

But it may be hard to convince the Yinka Dene that Enbridge board members are guided by concern for the greater good of Canada. According to the company website, six of the 13 board members live in the U.S. Of the rest, five live in Calgary and two in Ontario. The chair is from Florida.

Elder Gerald Amos shares the view that the project is of broad significance, though for him the significance is in the chance for Canada to show the world how to get relations with indigenous people right, by which he means, in part, not subordinating indigenous rights to corporate aspirations. If Canada can't get it right, he asks, who can?

Indeed, the project raises profound questions about economics, the environment and indigenous relations. As climate change forces humanity to decide on its future course, will Canada choose expansion of conventional energy sources, an ever-greater commitment to the pursuit of endless economic growth, and significantly reduced environmental protections? Can viable alternatives be put forward?

As relations with Aboriginal people continue to be marked by acute inequality, will Canada choose a confrontational approach to Aboriginal rights in which First Nations are forced to go to the Supreme Court to have their basic rights respected?

If Chief Jackie Thomas ends up in front of a bulldozer, will she be standing in the way of Canada's rightful destiny? If she ends up in front of a bulldozer, where will the faith community be? Or, alternatively, what will the faith community do to prevent such a confrontation?

Amos emphasizes that "we're all in it together." We have to find a way to live together. He knows that not everyone will agree with his views but he says "at the very least, we should give ourselves the opportunity to have a conversation about where it is we want our country to be going." >

Will Braun is Senior Writer for Canadian Mennonite magazine, in which the original version of this article appeared. He lives in Winnipeg.



subscribe to the Dutch Disease as a diagnosis for the Canadian economy, including Mark Carney, the head of the Bank of Canada. Canada's strong loonie doesn't mean the Canadian economy is sick; on the contrary, it points to its strength, owing not only to commodity exports but a well regulated banking industry which helped Canada avert much of the downgrading that has been plaguing other countries.

The green vote

That the target of his attack is in Western Canada does not appear to bother Mulcair. On its surface, this may appear to be

a strange political tack, given the eventual need to expand his power outside of Quebec and Ontario. But it appears Mulcair has little interest in re-establishing the NDP presence in its birthplace in Saskatchewan, and holds little hope in securing more than the one seat it has in Alberta, if indeed he can hold even that one. However, the environmental movement is a vote rich vein in British Columbia which Mulcair wants to mine. The only party fighting him in that province for that vote is Elizabeth May's Green Party, which of course, secured their lone seat in parliament on Vancouver Island.

The environmental issue in Canada's

west coast is the Northern Gateway pipeline. It is designed to deliver Alberta's oilsands resource to a coastal terminal and from there to an energy hungry Asia-Pacific market (further evidenced by China's state-backed oil company's recent \$15.1 billion offer to take over Canada's Nexen Inc.). As Mulcair dared to venture into unfriendly Alberta territory to attend the 100th anniversary of the Calgary Stampede in early July, he was given an immense gift from American regulators. A report was released severely criticizing Calgary's Enbridge Inc., the Northern Gateway proponent. None other than the

See Summer bliss on p.3

Column

Summer bliss *continued*

Chairman of the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, Debbie Hersman, stated that Enbridge's handling of a Michigan oil pipeline spill resembled the "Keystone Kops."

Initial warnings of how bad the spill may have been were ignored, helping turn what could have been a minor problem into an \$800 million disaster, more than five times the most previously costly oil spill on land in the United States. The criticism particularly targeted Enbridge's pipeline control room, where decisions to keep oil flowing were made rather than shutting down. For environmentalists, and for all concerned, this casts doubt on being able to trust the company who wants to build a pipeline through B.C. forests and a terminal at watershed, and by association has also probably plagued TransCanada with an unwelcome association for its Keystone XL Pipeline proposal through environmentally sensitive lands in the U.S.

Mulcair seized on this gift. Never a supporter of the Northern Gateway, the NDP leader says the U.S. report is just more evidence that the Enbridge proposal should not be approved. Although he has stated he will await the outcome of the federal review of the Northern Gateway proposal, he doubts anything will change his mind, particularly the concern of building a coastal terminal in an "extremely fragile ecosystem."

Premiers battle

At least Mulcair's opposition to the Northern Gateway remains principled on environmental grounds. While B.C. Premier Christy Clark remains noncommittal on the Northern Gateway, it appears her government's approval can be bought if a greater share of the anticipated revenue can be sent B.C.'s way. According to a study the provincial government released, its \$6.7 billion in anticipated tax revenue over 30 years and some 25 percent of employment benefit is insufficient to hold 100 percent of the marine environmental risk and 58 percent of the land-based risk. Alberta's Premier Redford, sensing a raid on her province's royalty revenues, moved immediately to stop any talk of fundamentally changing how provincial revenues are shared over and above what already exists in Canada's fiscal federalism. This dispute arose just a few days after Redford and Clark met quietly in Alberta.

Redford also met with the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, who had earlier been a stronger supporter of Mulcair's "Dutch Disease" diagnosis. His support for that idea has been much more muted recently as efforts have been made in improving communication as to how much Ontario's industrial base is benefiting from oilsands and other resource developments. It appears Redford was trying to reach some common ground on a potential national energy policy prior to the all premiers meeting in Halifax for the Council of Federation, to no avail given Premier Clark's continued reluctance to support a pipeline on which Alberta's future oil exports will depend.

Mulcair's sunny days

Mulcair can only be buoyed by the premiers' inability to find common ground. He certainly doesn't have to shoot Harper's messengers, when indeed they seem to be doing that well themselves. As Canadians enjoy some of the hottest dog days of summer on record, Mulcair is enjoying some poll results which show he and his party are favoured over the Harper Conservatives. Of course it is a long way off to the real poll that counts, but Mulcair will bask in these sunny results while he can, and stay the strategic course he has set in these early months of his leadership. ➤

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister. He lives in Edmonton and is enjoying a wet summer there with his family.



Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang



There are lots of newfangled words out there. A few years back, if you had asked if I had seen the Instagram you had Tweeted, I'd have checked you for signs of a stroke. But language changes fast, these days.

One of these newfangled words is "mashup." A mashup happens when you take two or more different pieces of music, data or video and "mash" them together to create something new. For example, every January an American artist by the name of DJ Earworm releases a mashup called "The United State of Pop," in which he samples different pieces of the hit songs from the previous year and turns them into a single pop song. (One of his best is 2009's "Blame it on the Pop," which is worth googling if you have a moment.)

Mashups are very popular right now. But I know one guy who has been doing his own kind of mashup for seven years now.

His name is Clarence Keesman. He's the Executive Director of The Refuge, a Christian organization in Oshawa, Ont. that helps homeless youth. It's a loving, caring place where young people can begin to heal from their horrific past. It's a place that serves a desperate need in the Durham Region. The stats speak for themselves. Of the youth who come to The Refuge, 92 percent have been sexually or physically abused. Also, 78 percent are present or former wards of the crown and 72 percent were asked to leave their homes by their parents or caregiver.

At The Refuge these kids find a community of believers who help them feel loved, nurtured, encouraged and safe – and who help them heal so they can move forward in their lives.



The Durham Quarter Marathon includes a one kilometer scramble for kids.

Sadly, the problem of youth homelessness isn't just confined to Oshawa. Across Canada, the number of youth shelter beds has risen 450 percent in the past 25 years. In Toronto alone, there are an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 homeless kids wandering the streets on any given night.

Which brings us back to the mashup.

Like many Canadians, Clarence Keesman is a runner. Running is a popular sport. In fact, the number of Canadian recreational runners has doubled in the last 10 years alone. These are nothing like the solo "joggers" of the 1970s – modern runners train hard and compete in actual, bona fide races. In the year 2000, the first year the Toronto Waterfront Marathon was held, 1,500 runners registered. Last year there were 22,000.

Keesman saw the opportunity for a mashup: if homelessness is a growing problem, and running is a growing

What would Jesus run?

sport ... why not host a charity race to raise money for the homeless? And that's how the Durham Quarter Marathon was born.

Since 2006, Keesman has been organizing a charity run through the streets of Oshawa in support of The Refuge. In its first year, 226 people lined up at the start of the 10.25 km race. This year there were about 700 participants and dozens of blue-shirted volunteers from area churches, who handed out water during the race and food and prizes afterwards.

"Our goal is to run a classy, well-run charity event that raises money for The Refuge," says Keesman. "But people tell us that they see something different in our race. The volunteers seem a little friendlier, happier and more helpful. It's one reason so many people come back each year."

Low-key evangelism

Interestingly, while the Durham Quarter Marathon supports a Christian organization, the race itself doesn't go out of its way to proselytize. There's no soap-box evangelism at the starting line. That's deliberate, says Keesman.

"Our witness isn't an overt one. We're a Christian organization doing good work in the community, and inviting people to come and contribute to our mission. That's it. That's the witness. They know who we are, and what our ministry is – and if they want to do more than just show up for the race, we can help them do that, too. But we leave it up to them to come to us."

To help people do just a little more, Keesman came up with another ingenious mashup. Every recreational race hands out a "race kit" to runners. Usually it's a bag filled with the racer's bib, timing chip, complimentary shirt and various promotional items from local businesses.

Last year instead of a bag, Keesman handed out cardboard boxes. On top of each was a list of personal care items needed by youth at The Refuge – shaving supplies, deodorant, wipes, and so on. Racers were invited to fill the boxes and return them on race day.

"I didn't know what to expect," says Keesman. "But last year we got 300 kits back full of stuff. I was blown away."

All of this is very good news for The Refuge, which relies heavily on donations of food, supplies and funds for its day-to-day ministry. But it's also an event that's bringing the community together. Keesman notes

that friends, families and coworkers are joining up to raise money and run together, all of which raises the profile of the ministry and widens the circle of lives touched by its work.

"I'd love to see the run get even bigger," says Keesman. "But more than that, I'd like people to be inspired by what we do. If someone comes to our run from Guelph and they start to see a need to help homeless kids in Guelph, then I think the Lord's work has been done. Jesus spoke at great length about our obligation to help the needy and less fortunate – so the more active people are in their community, the more the love of Christ spreads."

If the success of The Refuge Run is any indication, that message is spreading – one step at a time. ➤

Lloyd Rang (lloyd.rang@rogers.com and @lloydrang on Twitter) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Editorials

Forgo



Melissa Slager

If a single mustard seed can multiply so dramatically, try to imagine the power of a mountain of mustard seeds – the impact of God's people, called by God and working collectively through faith to spread the gospel.
– Richard Stearns, "The Hole in Our Gospel"

I'm in my mid-30s now and I'm starting to understand what people are talking about when they mention having a midlife crisis.

There's no desire to buy a convertible, dye my hair red or get some sort of hip-but-meaningful tattoo. Just those gnawing, persistent questions, fed even more by my professed faith: Is this it? Am I doing enough? Shouldn't I be adopting a kid from Haiti or something? Or starting some kind of Christian commune in the middle of a cow pasture?

We recently hosted some good friends who work through Christian Reformed World Missions. They were my spiritual mentors when I was a teenager, and it was refreshing to catch up and laugh. But they've been overseas now for well over a decade, bringing the Word of God to some of the hardest-to-reach people in the world. In that time, what have I accomplished for God? What do I have to show for the spiritual training these friends gave me and for which I'm ostensibly grateful? Being fruitful and multiplying to the tune of two young girls, in my mind, doesn't count – at least not for what I'm talking about here. Arguably, sponsoring two other young girls in Honduras doesn't count for much either. Their photos are on the refrigerator like family, but really they're another line-item on the household budget who we have fun shopping for when it's birthday and Christmas time. Even giving the random guy in the grocery store parking lot \$5 for gas was a fail – I sure didn't do it with a smile, and he's the one who said, "God bless."

In recent months my brother-in-law has given me reason, though, to see things through a different lens and to feel a real sense of hope and excitement for what non-superstars such as myself can accomplish for God in this broken world. More than that, a project he's involved in has helped me to see that small actions are not insignificant, especially when done within a community where they grow exponentially.

John Patton attends Solid Rock Church in Oregon and, with a group of like-minded men from Pursuit Church in Idaho, created a philanthropic project called Forgo. Forgo leverages smartphones to help modern consumers support worthy humanitarian causes. The application lets you "forgo" a small purchase – say, a venti caramel macchiato with whip – and instead "buy" a stake in the latest Forgo effort. That could mean building a well in a

water-thirsty community, feeding a hungry child or freeing a woman from sexual slavery. And this is not some vague notion of "feeding the hungry," but literally forgoing a \$4 latte to add 25 more meals to a container ship headed for Zimbabwe.

As the group's website puts it: "With Forgo the intention isn't to stop consuming; it's to consume a little less so we can give a little more."

Small numbers, big impact

By the middle of this summer, 212 people had "forgoed" a purchase, with nearly 500 registered for the service. About 50 Canadians visit the site each month and log about five "forgos." The most common "forgo" is for \$3. Those seem like small numbers – puny, really. But consider this: Since launching in January, Forgo has sent about \$42,000 to international causes.

Wow.

"Four dollars isn't a lot, but 1,000 people giving four dollars is," John said.

People who become regular "forgoers" catch an infectious buzz.

There's the usual latte and meal. But once people start thinking in terms of the immediate impact they can have on the world's poor and abused, it gets more creative.

Canceling an expensive vacation.

Eating leftovers and shopping from the pantry to give a week's worth of the grocery budget.

Purchasing cheaper golf balls and sending along the difference.



Opting not to repair the dented bumper on the Mercedes Benz – and gaining a visual reminder of God's call to generosity with every commute.

People start seeing their stuff differently. John puts it best: "Forgo is not about recurring monthly deductions, but instead Forgo is about lifestyle giving. Forgo helps develop a generous heart that is aware and in tune with the problems of the day.... We're trying to help people measure their life by a different standard."

And it's in a language our wired world gets.

To me, that's one of the real draws of the app. Not that it helps Christians be more Christian-y (although it does that remarkably well in a unique way), but that it fits so well with a spoiled young North American culture. This is an opportunity to invite non-Christian friends into a community that is doing God's work. What might the successful, urban software developer – who knows more about club-hopping than church-shopping – gain by being used by God? To experience God rather than being told about God? This is the body of Christ in action; in other words, this *is* the church.

The lesson for anyone using the app is the same, a lesson I've always known in my head and have been humbled more and more to know in my heart: It's not about me. It's not about you. It's not even about the rail-thin orphan or the world-worn woman smiling because she no longer has to undress for a man. It's about God. And it's about learning how to be better in tune with what God wants from our lives – every day, not some day – in order to better be God's hands and feet.

There are Christian superstars out there. I know some, and I love them. But most of us are spiritual duds, right? That doesn't mean our small decisions aren't important. There's something to be said about moving through the mundane, in tune with God's voice, and joining other like-minded and likely anonymous folks doing the same thing to make an outsized impact – simply by stepping out of the line at Starbucks.

Learn more about forgo at <http://forgo.it> and <http://www.facebook.com/forgo.it>

Melissa Slager graduated from Calvin College and is a freelance writer and journalist in the Pacific Northwest. She feels blessed beyond measure by her two young girls, but she might think about forgoing any more toys that involve obnoxious noises.

Families: hockey and church



Michael Buma

Summer is conference season in the academic world, and in July I had the pleasure of attending one of my favourite scholarly gatherings: a biennial academic conference devoted to the study of hockey.

As someone who studies cultural significations of the game, this conference is right in my wheelhouse. Researchers in the growing interdisciplinary field of "hockey studies" have been sharing their findings at these events for more than a decade, and this is the fourth time I've been able to attend. This year the hockey conference was at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, and, as usual, it left me with lots to think about.

One of the first presenters was a Russian professor who talked about Soviet era hockey defectors. During question period I asked him to explain the enigma that is Alexander Ovechkin, and was surprised to find out that the Russians find the young superstar's dynamic personality and recent struggles almost as puzzling as we do.

The next panel was on hockey literature. The first presenter suggested that Roy MacGregor's novel *The Last Season* is underwritten by the biblical prodigal son archetype, and the argument became even richer when the next presenter suggested that hockey novels tend to portray paternal absence and see violence as a return of the Oedipal repressed. The third presenter rounded things off with a discussion of Scott Young's juvenile hockey novels, and a spirited discussion about the level of agency that readers bring to these texts ensued.

Over the two and a half days there were a number of interesting papers: a discussion of Muscular Christian rhetoric in the 1905 Alan Loney murder trial (which stemmed from an on-ice incident), a sabermetric study of hockey scouting practices, a rhetorical analysis of NHL players' Twitter posts, a study of fans who have become disillusioned with the game, an analysis of the forgotten 1974 Summit Series (which Canada lost), and many others. One scholar who has worked as a consultant with several NHL teams made the case that the significant increase in soft-tissue injuries in recent years stems directly from flawed training regimes, especially over-reliance on the stationary bike. I gave my paper on hockey-themed advertising in the Original Six era, and later gave a reading from my book on Canadian hockey novels. All in all, this year's hockey conference was a great experience.

The title of this year's conference was "Constructing the Hockey Family: Home, Community, Bureaucracy and Marketplace," and it occurred to me that in some ways this small community of scholars is starting to feel a bit like a family too. One of the best features of the hockey conference is its friendliness and civility. Although plenty of disagreement and robust discussion goes on, the tone is always positive. There's a general sense that we're all on the same team, so to speak. People are kind and respectful, which isn't always the norm at academic conferences (at least in the Humanities). One of the reasons for this, I think, is that as part of the conference proceedings we always play an actual game of hockey. This year it was a road hockey game, but usually we're on the ice. One of the great things about the game is that it has a way of breaking down social barriers

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Letters

Dealing with Iran

In his article "The coming moment of truth with Iran" (CC June 25) Jonathan de Vries fails to make two important points. Nuclear weapons don't fit the just war theory, not to mention pacifism, and from that perspective Iran's government and all those working for the country to make it a nuclear power stand condemned. And the same could be said about countries that have them already. From a politically realistic perspective it is unlikely that these powers are willing to do away with their arsenal, but what rights have these countries to limit the number of countries? One could argue on moral grounds, but they seem to forfeit that right through their bullying. De Vries, by failing to discuss this issue, comes very close to a *realpolitik* approach and justification. But is such approach Christian? While he points out different avenues dealing with Iran, there is no indication what a Christian approach might be.

Bert den Boggende
Brooks, Alta.

Jonathan de Vries responds:

Bert Den Boggende claims that nuclear weapons do not "fit just war theory," and that all countries pursuing nuclear arsenals "stand condemned." While the threat posed to global society by nuclear weaponry may drive one to hope for a world without nuclear weapons, such a hope cannot reasonably inform modern geopolitical thinking. To suggest the adoption of a framework of international relations which discounts the existence of nuclear armaments (or the threat of their use) is as unrealistic as the attempts by the Medieval Church to ban the use of crossbows due to their destructive nature.

From both a Christian and a realist perspective, the difficulty posed by nuclear proliferation is that it renders many pre-existing strategic, political and military paradigms obsolete. Up until the end of World War Two, military conflict had been generally understood as involving conflicts between states that were motivated by limited and defined objectives, and which

were circumscribed by general norms of conduct. Just war theory is, for the most part, based upon this understanding of war.

Nuclear war, on the other hand, can never be conducted in half-measures. This fact is what led to the Cold War being a "cold" war. All of the existing and emerging nuclear powers were fixed into the deterrence relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, most of the world's emerging nuclear powers have either fallen into the old Cold War deterrence relationship (North Korea) or have found themselves locked into new deterrence relationships (India and Pakistan). Most nuclear states acknowledge that, except in the face of external threats that

reach an almost existential level, the actual use of nuclear weapons is to be avoided at all costs. To a certain extent, this geopolitical reality aligns with the just war principle that nuclear war could never be "just."

With Iran however, we are faced with a state whose own aims and ideology may grant increased legitimacy to the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, Iran-allied terrorist and paramilitary groups are not easily subject to deterrence as they cannot easily be the subject of nuclear retaliation. Thus we have the dilemma, to which there are no easy biblical or philosophical answers, of whether limited warfare in the present is justified to prevent the increased possibility of the use of nuclear weapons in the future.

Total Depravity?

If man is totally depraved, then what is Satan? God and Jesus called many people righteous. Just a couple of examples: Job was blameless and upright (Job 1:1). Zachariah and Elizabeth were both righteous in the sight

of God. And the Lord delights in those whose ways are blameless (Prov. 11:20). This does not sound as if we are totally depraved.

Janny VanderKynff
Beamsville, Ont.

Families: hockey and church *continued*



Shinny game at the hockey conference.

and bringing people together, and I think the ability to play together makes our academic conversations at the hockey conference more friendly and kind-spirited.

Church family

Another thought occurred to me as well: why isn't the tone of discussion in my church family as collegial as that of my hockey studies family?

I've been in leadership at my church for more than a year now as chair of our Transition Team, which is responsible for identifying the congregation's ministry needs and devising a new staffing model to fill them. During this time I've had a closer view of the workings of the church, and it hasn't always been pretty. As with any organization, I suppose petty squabbles, inflated egos and difficult personalities are to be expected. But what's surprised me most has been the negative tone that a few people insist on bringing to the conversation about who we are and where we're going. Why does anger seem to be the default emotional setting for some people in the CRC? Perhaps the saying about not wanting to know exactly what's in the hot dog you're eating applies to the church as well.

What's been most disturbing about my behind the scenes view has been witnessing the amount of badgering that our pastor is

routinely subjected to by a few members of his flock. Not long ago I was talking about this with a fellow parishioner, who commented that this sort of thing is basically par for the course in CRC churches. Given the number of pastors I can think of off the top of my head who have parted ways with their churches on bad terms in the last few years, I think this is probably true to some extent.

For anyone who's read the Bible and affirmed its teachings, this should boggle the mind. Why do we think it's okay to heap abuse on the servants God has called to lead us? Why do we think it's okay to criticize people without also building them up? Certainly conflict can and will arise, but surely we could do a better job of handling it in love as brothers and sisters in Christ. I know I'm only talking about a small segment of CRC folks here, but I think the mentality I'm describing is widespread enough in our denomination that we should be concerned.

There are two versions of a familiar cliché about families: "the family that prays together stays together" and "the family that plays together stays together." Our church families are usually pretty good at praying together. Perhaps, taking a cue from the camaraderie and friendliness that arises from the hockey conference shinny game, we should make more of an effort to play together too. ➤

Marian Van Til responds

The righteousness you cite in the above biblical characters – and in all who may be called "blameless," including us – is not our own. It is righteousness *imputed* to them and to us by Christ – thanks be to God for his marvelous gift! Our natural fallen state (and Satan's, of course) is indeed depraved, and thoroughly: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9). "Do not bring your

servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps. 143:2). "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" (Eccles. 7:20). "There is no one righteous; not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves..." (Romans 3:10-13a).

Baseball and faith

Many thanks to Christian Bell for his sublime essay on "Baseball and faith" (CC June 11). My introduction to baseball was the popular APBA board game played with high school friends in the '70s. Some of us worked as ballpark vendors, hawking popcorn and peanuts at Blue Jays games. Love of the game grew, and, as a longtime Chicago Cubs fan, I made a pilgrimage to Wrigley Field in the '90s.

The game certainly has had its heroes, and, darkly, its scapegoats – think Cubs fan Steve Bartman and Boston Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner. This scapegoat theme

was mined in the exceptional documentary *Catching Hell*. A couple of World Series victories for the Red Sox in recent years earned redemption for Buckner, and one can only wish the same fate for Bartman.

Love of the game continues. This summer my wife and daughter and I enjoyed a Mariners-Red Sox game at Safeco Field in Seattle. While the game wasn't exactly a classic (Red Sox won 5-0), we enjoyed congregating with fans of various stripes in the left field bleachers.

David Bacon
Richmond, B.C.

Christian Courier

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Michael Buma teaches in the English and Kinesiology Departments at the University of Western Ontario. His term as Interim Editor of the Christian Courier will end with the second August issue, and he has been greatly blessed by the experience of serving such a wonderful community of readers.

News

Liberal Christian denominations putting themselves out of business, says columnist

Marian Van Til, with files from CCO

NEW YORK — Ross Douthat says that by adapting themselves to the liberal secular culture, liberal Christian denominations — the mainline Protestant churches — have been making themselves irrelevant. If you're looking for secular liberalism you don't need to go to church to find it, says the *New York Times* columnist. As a result, those denominations everywhere are hemorrhaging members, and may cease to exist.

Exhibit A for Douthat's argument is the Episcopal Church and its counterpart in Canada, The Anglican Church of Canada. The columnist observes that Episcopalianism/Anglicanism today "looks roughly how Roman Catholicism would look if Pope Benedict XVI suddenly adopted every reform ever urged on the Vatican by liberal pundits and theologians." The church buildings, vestments and rituals are familiar, but the denomination is "flexible to the point of indifference on dogma," and

those who are interested in faith look elsewhere.

The latest example of that "flexibility" on the part of the Episcopal Church was to approve same-sex "marriage" and "transgender" clergy. On July 9 at the church's general convention in Indianapolis, Ind., the denomination's House of Bishops voted 111-41 to authorize a trial liturgical rite for same-sex "marriages."

On the same day, "the full convention approved new anti-discrimination language for transgendered clergy candidates and church members," reported the Associated Press. The term "transgender" refers to individuals who identify with, or somehow feel they are a member of, the opposite sex. The AP noted that some Episcopal dioceses "already ordain transgendered people or elect them to positions of parish leadership. However, advocates for the amendment argued they needed an explicit statement of acceptance as churchwide policy."

CRC asks members to pray for rain

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) — The Christian Reformed Church called on all its members to pray for an end to the drought that is still affecting much of North America and that began at the start of July.

In a July 18 letter sent to pastors and congregations across the United States and Canada, the CRC's executive director, Rev. Joel R. Boot, asked congregations to pray fervently until the drought is abated.

"I am writing to you on a matter of urgent concern that affects us all," Boot said in the letter. "Much of the United States and parts of central and eastern Canada are in the grip of what we are told is the worst drought in more than 50 years."

Boot's request was specific. "Pray for rain sufficient to break the drought and replenish the groundwater and reservoirs," he asked. "Pray for God's special care for people whose livelihoods depend on being able to grow crops. Pray for our food supply and for those who can scarcely afford

to buy food at current prices, let alone prices that may rise precipitously because of shortage. And remember all of the plants and animals in God's creation that depend on rain to stay alive and healthy."



The letter noted that the impact of the drought is being felt in the price of corn — of which the U.S. is the world's leading exporter — and that, without rain, "much of that crop will be lost, leading to shortages as well as increases in the cost of food here at home and around the world."

Boot concluded, "Times like these remind us that we are completely dependent on God. Please join with me this Sunday — and every Sunday until the drought is abated — in fervent prayer that God will send us rain."

Despite persecution, Muslims are embracing Christ in record numbers

Marian Van Til and CRCNA

PALOS HEIGHTS, Illinois — More Muslims have converted to the Christian faith in the past 40 years than during the entire 14 centuries since Islam's advance from western Arabia, according to statistics cited by Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). Back to God Ministries is the radio-TV-media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.



God is clearly at work, and he is gracious. But in terms of the statistics, the decisive factor behind the growing number of converts is that many more Muslims are being exposed to new ideas — including the Gospel — than at any other time in the past.

"Radio has been the initial factor behind this phenomenal numerical growth of converts," reports BTGMI's Arabic ministry leader. "In more recent years, radio outreach has been significantly augmented by other means of information technology. Internet-based services and cell phone text messaging are leading the way."

Back to God Ministries has worked in Arabic media outreach for 54 years. In 1999, it began a partnership with the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). It also linked with Words of Hope, the media ministry associated with the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Those associations made for more effective evangelism and discipleship.

"Especially among youth and the educated, Muslims are open to considering other beliefs," adds MERF's Arabic leader. (Names are being withheld out of concern for the safety of ministry staff.) They have time to surf the Internet,

listen to the radio and talk about new ideas. It is Christ's life and teaching which Muslims find most appealing."

One new believer from a closed country in the Middle East shared how his journey to faith in Christ started with doubting Islamic claims. That led him to embrace atheistic Communism. He wrote to BTGMI Arabic ministry staff: "It was your Wednesday evening radio broadcast which forced me to search for and read the Christian Gospel. I was struck by the refined and most unusual teachings of Issa (Jesus)."

Jesus appears in dreams, visions

Regarding Jesus, many converts attest to having experienced his appearing to them in dreams or visions while they were still Muslims. While dreams play a minor role in conversions in the West, such reports have been occurring regularly from Muslim converts for at least a decade. More recently, when a Christian magazine in California asked 600 ex-Muslims about their conversions, over a quarter of them emphatically confirmed that such dreams or visions played a crucial role.

AlmightyWind.com says others have found the percentage higher. Karel Sanders, a missionary in South Africa, reported that among African Muslims, "42 percent of the new believers come to Christ through visions, dreams, angelic appearances and hearing God's voice." And Dawn's Friday Fax, a website that focuses on missionary reports, says, "Arabic-speaking moderators explain supernatural experiences such as dreams, visions and healings through prayer to Jesus. 'This is a hot topic in our region. People from all over the Middle East call us, telling how they were healed through prayer in Jesus' name. They quote one missionary as saying, 'Muslim

Olympics, Year of Faith, allow Catholics 'unique opportunity' to spread Gospel

ROME (Zenit.org) — At press time the Olympic Games were still on the horizon in Great Britain. But the "Year of Faith" was initiated by Pope Benedict on Oct. 11, 2011, on the 50th anniversary of the second Vatican Council. The Year is designed "to help Catholics appreciate the gift of faith, deepen their relationship with God and strengthen their commitment to sharing faith with others." And the Olympics provide an excellent chance to do that, opening a "unique opportunity to spread the Gospel," says Roman Catholic bishop John Arnold of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

In his own diocese, says Arnold, they've split the year into four seasons. "The first is to discover what faith is: What are we inviting people to when we invite them to faith? Then we are going to be looking at a second season on the sacraments: how we celebrate our faith. The third season will be: How we live our faith, which is social action, and how we make an impact on the society in which we live because of the faith we have. Then the fourth season will be dedicated to the personal spirituality of growth, understanding and prayer."

The bishop says "different dioceses have taken different approaches, but everybody is really encouraging people to take this opportunity to investigate their faith, to deepen it in whatever way."

Asking athletes to speak

Bishop Arnold says that the Catholic Church "has taken very seriously the provision of chaplains around the Olympic villages." But the church is also asking Christian athletes "to speak about how faith impacts them as they strive for excellence in their own sports." The bishop notes that many of those athletes "have been very generous in speaking, particularly to young people, about what determination and dedication can mean, particularly in the light of faith."

The local parishes in his dioceses are also welcoming visitors who come to London for the Games to worship with them, and are providing the sacraments for Catholics. "I think the Olympics will have a good effect. They are certainly bringing an awful lot of hard work, but I think it's looking very promising," said Arnold.

He concluded, "The local parishes also have additional lay chaplains to welcome people when they come. It's very difficult to know who will be there, and what their needs will be.... Someone may be coming to the games and there's an opportunity to speak to them, in some way, about the faith that we have."

listeners often call to tell us about dreams and visions of Jesus, wanting to know what that means for them."

Such people become open to encountering the Gospel through various media. A young couple from another country where the Bible is forbidden first heard the Gospel over the airwaves. They became Christians a few years ago and now have fellowship with a small group of other believers. They keep in touch with BTGMI staff through Skype and quietly point their friends and relatives to the Arabic ministry websites.

The young man recently shared the news that his sister and her husband have joined his small Bible study group. In addition, that couple has invited their brother and his wife to participate in the Bible study.

"Such events are multiplying, and it is heart-warming that converts reach out with such wisdom and zeal to see their loved ones following the Lord Jesus," reports BTGMI's Arabic leader. "Yes, there is salvation power in the Gospel."

Other Christian ministries and missions that bring the Gospel to Muslims — such as Gospel for Asia and Partners International, both of which minister primarily through indigenous pastors and workers — concur that many former Muslims are following Christ's call. That is so despite the very real possibility of persecution, imprisonment, torture and even death from family and community members for rejecting Islam.

News

Goal of alternative 'abortion caravan': ending abortion in Canada in 18 years

OTTAWA (LSN) – Forty-two years ago, a group of civil rights activists calling themselves "Furious Women" traveled across Canada to demand legal and unrestricted access to abortion – and its sponsorship by the government. Eighteen years later, their Abortion Caravan achieved its goals with the 1988 Supreme Court Morgentaler decision that negated Canada's abortion law.

Now, after 24 years of unrestricted access to abortion, a New Abortion Caravan has made its way across the country. Beginning on May 29, members of the New Caravan stood in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery on the same steps where the Furious Women stood in 1970. But this time, instead of a black coffin filled with coat hangers, the young men and women of the New Abortion Caravan stood beside pictures of the bloodied and tangled remains of aborted babies.

"If we do not show the pictures," said Jonathon Van Maren, communications director of the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR), "the victims will remain out of sight. Injustice that is invisible inevitably becomes tolerable." But he added that the opposite is also true: "Injustice that is visible inevitably becomes intolerable."

The beginning of the end

The founders of The New Abortion Caravan, a project of CCBR's End the Killing campaign, say they hope to redeem the old abortion caravan and reverse its effects – in 18 years. "That's our deadline for the pro-life movement to end abortion in Canada," says Stephanie Gray, co-founder and executive director. "We're convinced this new abortion caravan is the beginning of the end."

Leaving Vancouver on May 29 and traveling cross-country, the caravan stopped in 16 cities in five provinces, reaching Ottawa on Canada Day, as they had planned. Carrying

a small white coffin filled with miniature plastic fetuses, the young volunteers walked to 24 Sussex Drive in a funeral procession for the hundreds of thousands of babies killed each year in Canada.

"Just as the women of the 1970 caravan brought a coffin to the prime minister's home, so are we bringing one," said Stephanie Gray. "We are presenting Prime Minister Harper, as the elected leader of our country, with a child's coffin representing the pre-born Canadians his government and governments preceding have failed so badly."

Unmasking 'choice'

Along either side of the coffin, volunteers stood holding signs showing the remains of abortion victims. Their truck was parked just down the street, its sides covered with similar pictures. The signs on the trucks often underline the ironic contradictions of the pro-abortion culture: one sign shows a pregnant woman smoking opposite an aborted fetus with the tagline, "Smoking harms babies; abortion kills them."

The signs were not pleasant but were not meant to be. Stephanie Gray explained that their purpose is to "contrast the beauty of the unborn child with the ugliness of abortion. We are unmasking choice, opening the casket on abortion."

Abortion advocates are not the only ones who do not want to see inside that coffin. Within the pro-life movement itself, the New Abortion Caravan has met with resistance and hesitation. Won't the pictures hurt women? Don't they abuse the dignity of the dead child? Aren't they too awful for anyone to see?



The CCBR's answer is a firm No. "If we can't face this," said Gray, "we can't fight it. People aren't fighting abortion because they have never been faced by it."

For the same reason, people are having abortions. When Van Maren began working with the New Abortion Caravan, a girl who had undergone an abortion three weeks earlier came to him and said, "Nobody showed me what abortion looks like."

The power of truth

It is exactly through showing visibly and undeniably the truth of abortion that the New Abortion Caravan intends to change hearts and save lives: just like William Wilberforce circulated diagrams of slave ships with blacks packed like cargo into the hold – which resulted in the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Just like Lewis Hine photographed child factory workers, who worked 18-hour days and were sometimes crushed in the machinery, until child labour laws were instituted in 1938. Just like Emmett Till's mother insisted on an open casket funeral to show how segregation in the south had led to her son to being beaten beyond recognition, and to death – and 100 days later in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat.

Gray closed her comments with a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail": "Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but



must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured." Gray concluded, "Here's the good news. It can be cured, and it will be cured in our lifetime." ➤

Experts: Marriage leads to economic prosperity, education plays key role

NEW YORK (LifeSiteNews.com) – Defining marriage has long had religious, moral and legal components. However, a growing number of economists, journalists and social researchers are concluding that getting and staying married is also a key to economic prosperity and domestic tranquility.

This reality recently became the subject of a lengthy *New York Times* (NYT) article entitled "Two Classes, Divided by 'I Do.'"

Citing a host of secular, socially-politically liberal professors, the 3,900-word analysis came to the same conclusion that more conservative, longtime apologists for traditional marriage have come to: marriage is not only good for the soul but also for one's bank account.

Studies say skyrocketing rates of single parenthood account for some of the widening income gap between well-to-do and those who are struggling. Experts estimate new parenting trends account for anywhere from 10 percent (Harvard sociology professor Bruce Western) to 40 percent (Robert Lerman of the Urban Institute) of the differential.

Family marriage and childbirth patterns put families on "different trajectories," according to Mindy Scott, a demographer with the research center Child Trends. Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist based at Johns Hopkins University, said, "It is the 'privileged' Americans who are marrying, and marrying helps them stay privileged." One reason is that married men who must provide for their family have greater incentive to be conscientious about their vocation.

Marriage improves work

Married men "enjoy an income premium of about 19 percent in the United States compared to their similarly credentialed peers," said W. Bradford Wilcox, director of



the National Marriage Project and professor of sociology at the University of Virginia. They "work about 160 hours more compared to their similarly credentialed peers after they transition into marriage in that first year of married life."

"Men who get married and stay married tend to be better workers," he said in a lecture delivered at Acton University,

hosted by the Acton Institute in June. "They work harder; they work longer hours; they work more strategically; and as a consequence, they tend to earn more money."

Wilcox added that marriage benefits both partners economically. "Women who get and stay married, by the end of their lives have a lot more in the way of assets – whether it's a home or some kind of retirement account." Parents share other economic incentives, including differentiation of labour, and they "are able to pool their income and benefit from economies of scale, in part," said Wilcox.

Discarded social obligations

Even from a secular viewpoint, the foundation of stable homes is crumbling under the weight of discarded social obligations. Some 41 percent of births in the U.S. take place out-of-wedlock. Such births have tripled since 1990 among white women with "some college education." However, 60 percent of out-of-wedlock babies are born to women with a high school education or less. By their late 20s, one-third of women with a high school education or less had children with more than one man. This instability has a deleterious effect on

everyone in the household. Mindy Scott of Child Trends said, "Having men in the house for a short time with ambiguous parenting roles can be really disruptive for children."

Those who finish college, marry and then have children have a huge advantage, as do their children. People in the top one-third of income are more likely to have intact families. And according to Western and his Harvard colleague Tracey Shollenberger, 88 percent of children in that bracket grow up with both parents. Wilcox noted in a separate *Times* article that only two percent of children born to white, college-educated women are born out-of-wedlock. Illegitimacy "varies by education more than by race," said Scott.

Charles Murray documents the same pattern in his newest book, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*. The most important impact of differing marriage trends is not economic but social and spiritual, and it is visited not on the parents but upon the children.

Jennifer Roback Morse of The Ruth Institute, a think tank dedicated to understanding and defending the traditional family, told LifeSiteNews that parents' differences allow them to equip their children with a mix of skills and abilities beyond that available to either individual parent. Healthy socialization also increases the child's opportunity to become a productive citizen.

On the other hand, those raised without family attachments fall victim to pathologies as widely divergent as gang recruitment and institutional autism. "The substitutes to the family are expensive and ineffective, and taxpayers end up paying the price," she said during one of her own lectures at Acton University. A 2008 study found family breakdowns cost taxpayers \$112 billion a year, the equivalent of the GDP of New Zealand. Statistics, though, do not measure the human toll. ➤

Columns

Principalities
& Powers

David Koyzis



The Christians of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia come from very ancient communities, which predate the rise of Islam by centuries. In fact, with the exception of the Indian subcontinent, these regions once boasted Christian majorities, perhaps even as late as the 14th century of our era. Philip Jenkins tracks the story of these communities in his 2008 book, *The Lost History of Christianity*. However, over the course of some 50 generations, most of these people eventually converted to the faith of Muhammad to remove themselves and their families out from under legal disabilities, especially high taxes, which had effectively made them second-class citizens in their own countries. Those who maintained their ancestral Christianity were and remain a diminishing minority, steadfastly holding to their creed in the face of enormous social and political pressure.

In such countries as Egypt and Iraq, professing the Christian faith is a definite liability, even if Christians there have tended to hold disproportionate economic, and occasionally even political, influence. In the mid 20th century Egyptian and Iraqi Christians generally cast their lot, sometimes but not always reluctantly, with Arab nationalists such as Gamal Abdel Nasser and Saddam Hussein. Although Egyptian Christians had clung to their pre-Arab Coptic identity, many hoped that, if they came onside of Arab nationalism, their status would rise accordingly. In fact, the numbers of Christians working within the nationalist movements were greater than their proportion of the general population would suggest. George Habash, founder of the Arab Nationalist Movement (1951), which was allied with Nasser's cause, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1967), was born into the Palestinian Christian community during the years of the British mandate. More recently, the Chaldean Catholic Tariq

Christians, nationalism and the 'Arab Spring'



Egyptian Christians at a rally calling for Christian-Muslim unity.

Aziz was Saddam Hussein's deputy prime minister in Iraq.

Arab nationalism seemed to be on the cutting edge of progress in the years immediately following the Second World War. The Cold War played an important role, as the Soviet Union provided critical financial and military support for the nationalists, whose anti-Western stance made them credible clients of Soviet strategic interests in this oil-rich region.

Islamist future

Times have changed. The Soviet Union has been gone for nearly a generation. Far from being the wave of the future, the remaining Arab nationalist leaders look increasingly like ageing tyrants, clinging to power and privilege for fear of their own lives as the "Arab Spring" threatens their continued rule. Those who miscalculate the public mood may find themselves, like Libya's late Muammar Qaddafi, victims of revolutionary violence and unlamented in death. In this second decade of the 21st century, the future appears to belong to something that would have been seen as hope-

lessly retrogressive a few years ago: the Islamist movement, whose agitations have been felt in a wide swath of territory extending from Morocco to the Philippines.

Although the Islamists are no less anti-Western than their Arab nationalist predecessors, they obviously have no place for Christians in their ranks. In fact, Christians in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere are uneasy with the "Arab Spring," even as it seems so inspiring to naïve Westerners with glowing memories of the fall of the Berlin Wall and Prague's "Velvet Revolution." The toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad led to conditions that have prompted the once-numerous Assyrian Christian community to emigrate elsewhere. Coptic Christians, now the largest Christian community in the Middle East, fear for their own future in a country governed even in part by the Muslim Brotherhood. Lebanon's Christians, once a majority, are a diminishing community in their own homeland and an increasingly larger diaspora abroad.

It is tempting to criticize the Christians of the Middle East for siding with the Arab nationalists of a previous generation, recalling William Ralph Inge's maxim: "Whoever marries the spirit of this age will find himself a widower in the next." Indeed, it is difficult to sympathize with the likes of Hosni Mubarak and Bashar al-Assad, whose corrupt and despotic ways have made enemies at home and abroad. Yet the Christians in those countries have not exactly had a lot of options, politically speaking. They have had to try their best to get along with whoever holds power, judging not so much which regime will benefit them the most as which will harm them the least. It is an unenviable position to be in, and we should continue to pray for them and work to protect them when and where we can.

David T. Koyzis teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., and has recently completed a book manuscript on authority, office and the image of God.

Reformational computing in Nicaragua

Dave Stienstra

Nicaragua is full of failed and failing financial investments. There are also investments that are paying off very well, but it struck me this week as I walked along the beach just how many failed dreams are represented by deteriorating beach-front construction projects. So many hopes have been disappointed, dreams turned into crumbling concrete and overgrown patios.

Yet, I've also witnessed a very different kind of investment that is producing quite the opposite kind of result through a strong focus on building up people. I work with the Nehemiah Center in the capital city of Managua. Their mission is to come alongside Nicaraguan Christians, supporting them in their growth and ministries by exploring with them the ways that God is calling his people to live fully and missionally in every aspect of life. It is hard not to be excited about how this investment will pay off, not just in the short term but also for the long.

My role has involved IT support for the Nehemiah Center, but I have also worked with computer teachers in local Christian schools. For the past two years I've been building a network of Christian school computer teachers that we affectionately call RedProCom (meaning *Red de Profesores Cristianos de Computación*). Prior to forming the group, virtually all of the teachers were working independently without any collaboration. The goal of RedProCom is to unite these teachers, help them work together, support each other and offer them training to help them be more effective as computer teachers.

The impetus for forming the group was a donation of 100 refurbished computers. However, due to our belief that transformation comes through investing in people, our focus has been on Biblical worldview, Open Source Software and the formation of a common curriculum that would be avail-

able for anyone to use. Without teaching and administration skills, even a lab of shiny new computers could become a crumbling patio.

RedProCom has been meeting once a month since September 2010. The teachers have shared that Biblical worldview training has opened their eyes to what it means to be a Christian computer teacher. One of the first teachers to join the group, Walner, makes a representative statement when he says, "Before I was just teaching programs like Word, Excel, Powerpoint. Now I realize and teach that our computers are tools that we can use for either good or bad. I teach my students that they need to be careful to use computers to glorify God."

Open Source orientation

The Open Source orientation of RedProCom has also opened eyes. "We were accustomed to using pirated software. We saw this as the *normal* thing to do – we didn't know it was illegal," relates one principal. "It wasn't until the folks from RedProCom came and made us aware that we came to see that we were being poor Christian witnesses," she adds.

Of the schools that participate, many have already switched over to using Free and Open Source Software such as Edubuntu and LibreOffice. The principal recounts her story, "Honestly, I had a lot of fears about changing our computer system.... [But] the teachers have received many tools and have discovered many new options they weren't familiar with before.... Now we have realized that we have made the best decision. We feel that we are working with total integrity and that we have authority to tell our students that they too should be doing things honestly."



Group of teachers at a monthly meeting in one of the donated labs.

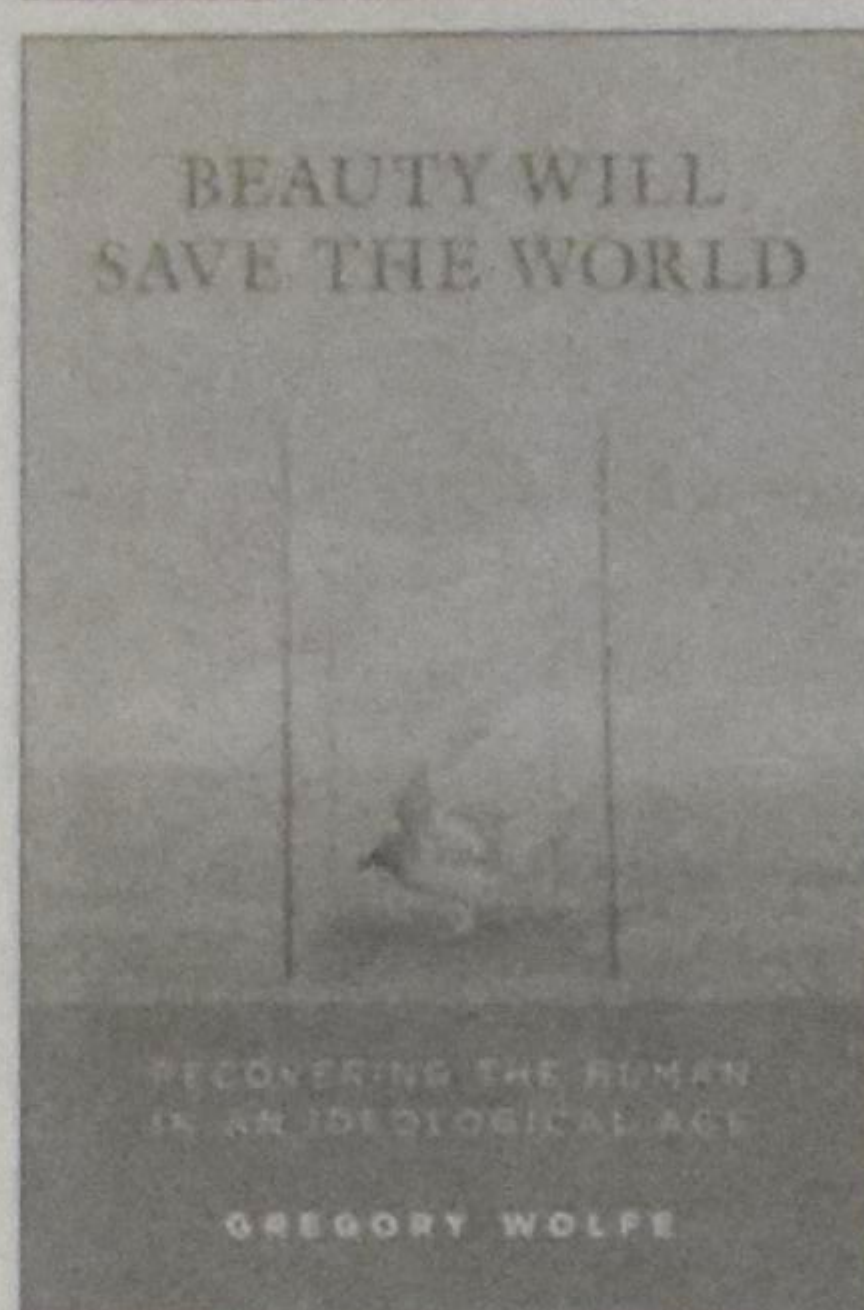
The philosophy behind Open Source software coincides very much with the kind of investing that we're about. Open Source software proponents celebrate collaboration, open learning and open sharing for any purpose. It's a kind of investment that yields many returns and encourages paying it forward.

Many challenges still face Nicaragua, and especially the educational system. Financial limitations, under-education among teachers and other factors continue to impose significant barriers to development. But if we can create a culture of working together and mutual benefit, and if we can come alongside Nicaraguans discovering together what God has called us to in terms of technology, the return on investment will benefit not just Nicaragua, but us as well, both now and for generations to come.

Dave Stienstra, originally from Grand Rapids, Mich., has been in serving in Nicaragua at the Nehemiah Center for seven years. The RedProCom project is a collaborative effort supported by EduDeo Ministries, ACECEN (Association of Christian Schools of Nicaragua) and the Nehemiah Center.



Reviews



Beauty Will Save the World: Recovering the Human in an Ideological Age
by Gregory Wolfe
Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2011

Beauty's place in redemption

John Franklin

After several decades of exile from conversations about art "beauty is back." It has become a focus for discussion among artists, art critics and philosophers of art in a way that would have been resisted in the recent past. The twentieth century was not welcoming to the subject of beauty. This return of beauty is manifest not only in discourse on the arts but also in discourse on theology. Theologians are giving fresh attention to the aesthetic and are once again making age-old connections between beauty and the transcendent that are now only a faint memory amid the currents of our postmodern world.

This insightful work by Gregory Wolfe – the founding Editor of *Image* – takes up the theme of beauty with a particular focus on literature. The title "beauty will save the world" is drawn from the writings of Dostoevsky. Just what it means is matter open for discussion. But for Wolfe it is clear that beauty will serve as the antidote to our inclination to look to "politics and intellectual dialectics" to address the decadence of West. These have been tried and found wanting. Wolfe invites us to set our hopes for renewal on the "imaginative visions of the artist and the mystic" as these provide the cultural grounding of all politics and rhetoric.

The book is divided into five parts. Part One, *From Ideology to Humanism*, offers autobiographical details and a clear account of Wolfe's often-conflicted pilgrimage within a conservative worldview. Part Two, *Christianity, Literature and Modernity*, provides a rich account of Catholic literary figures whose influence has been significant both on twentieth century literature and on Wolfe's understanding of the links between faith and culture. Parts Three, Four and Five explore contributions of a number of artists including Evelyn Waugh, Geoffrey Hill, Shusaku Endo and Wendell Berry as well as three visual artists whose works manifest the moral and religious sensibilities that offer a redemptive thread to a fragmented culture. The authors discussed include Wolfe's teachers and others whose writings have had a shaping influence on the author.

Believing as he does that it is in imagination that we will find the resources for a renewal of culture Wolfe laments the fact that "a large body of believers ... have essentially given up on contemporary culture ... they do not believe that Western culture can produce anything that might inform and deepen their own faith." He continues, "For me, the most depressing trend of all is the extent to which Christians have belittled or ignored the imagination and succumbed to politicized and ideological thinking." It is Wolfe's contention that the renaissance of fiction, poetry and music that host religious themes augers well for a fresh influence of faith on our culture of confusion and uncertainty. He is an advocate for Christian humanism, which he suggests is characterized by the effort to first grasp our current condition and then to speak into it with the voice of faith. There is no intent to be preachy or moralistic, as art by nature is indirect and shies away from the didactic. The Christian subculture of publishers, record labels and art galleries are for Wolfe, products of a failed imagination. Instead of being innovative the art is merely derivative.

It is evident throughout the book that Wolfe is not only well versed in the literature about which he writes but that he has been shaped in his own thinking by a rich array of authors who carry no fear of the partnership between deep faith and good art. Among the writers he cites are George Bernanos, Fredrick Buechner, Annie Dillard, Graham Greene, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, Evelyn Waugh and poets T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Geoffrey Hill, Denise Levertov and Richard Wilbur. These and others cited in the book might be thought of as stewards of mystery; that dimension of life over which we have no control. Many of the details of Wolfe's own journey to Catholicism are recounted in the book and include an acknowledgement of the influence of the writings of Evelyn Waugh.

In the chapter on his teacher and mentor Russell Kirk reference is made to the "tragic sense of life" a phrase borrowed from the existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. "The tragic sense of life is opposed to ideology, which posits a belief in the malleability of human nature" says Wolfe. His mentor "believed that any form of political thought which reduced the complexity of human nature to simple abstractions is a dangerous departure from the truth of our tragic sense of life." Grounding Kirk's view was a "sacramental vision, his vivid sense of the createdness of the world."

It is just such a sacramental vision that sustains Wolfe's belief that "beauty will save the world." This is a deeply Catholic work. He writes, "The communitarian, sacramental and tragic dimensions of the Catholic tradition grew out of a faith attuned to beauty. The effort to renew this tradition through literature and the arts shapes my own form of Catholic civil engagement."

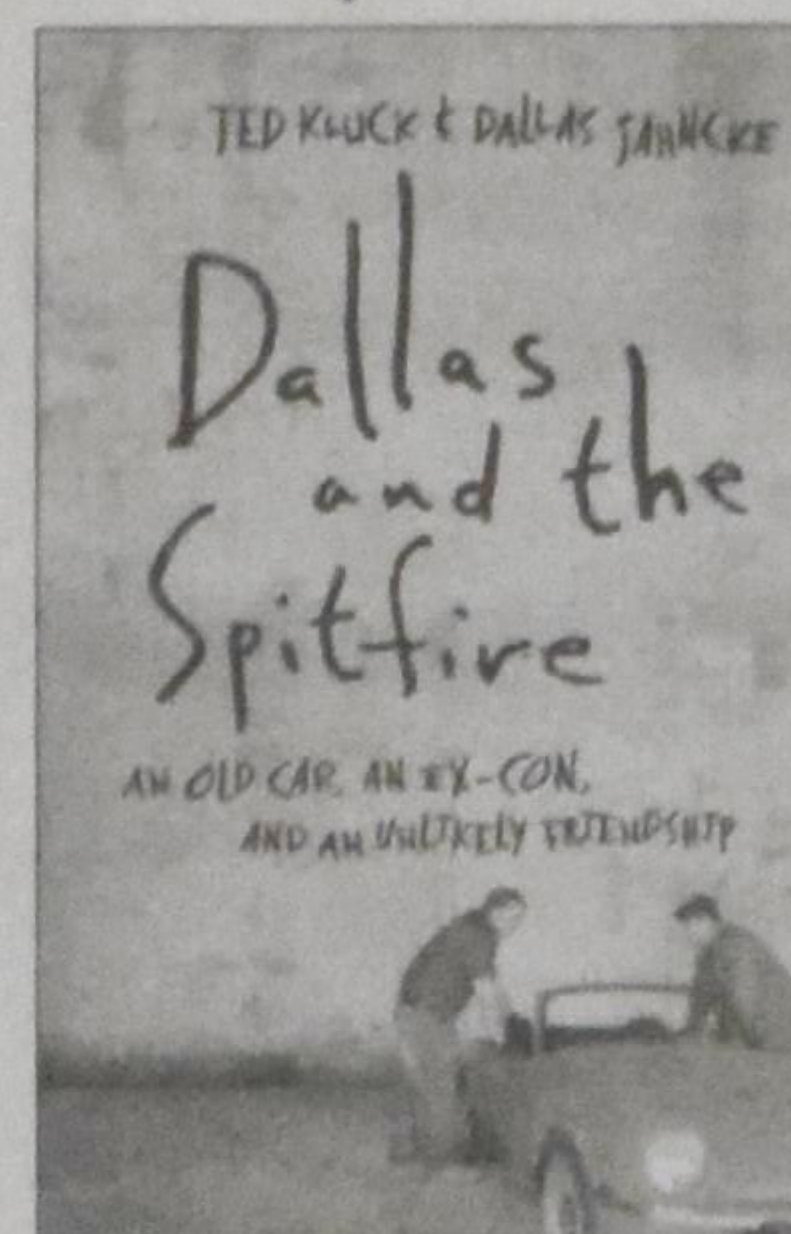


Gregory Wolfe

Those who adhere to a Reformed viewpoint will no doubt be less confident in the "redemptive power of beauty." One can't help but wonder if this is not too great a burden to put on the gift of human art making. But I expect we can all agree that art provides some sign that suggests that there is more to the world than reason is able to deliver. Though the author clearly hews to a particular account of how we are to understand the world – he does so with grace, wit and a wealth of intelligent insights along the way. The reader of this work will be well rewarded.

There are many valuable insights about art and its place in our society to be found in this collection of essays as we benefit from the author's well-honed expertise. Lest we expect too much from the title I will conclude with a quote from the opening chapter. "If art cannot save our souls, it can do much to redeem the time, to give us a true image of ourselves, both in the horror and the boredom to which we can descend, and in the glory which we may, in rare moments, be privileged to glimpse."

John Franklin (imago@rogers.com) is the Executive Director of Imago, a Toronto-based organization whose mandate is "to affirm the artistic gift and to encourage and facilitate creative initiatives in the arts that will make a positive contribution to the Canadian cultural landscape."



Dallas and the Spitfire

by Ted Kluck and

Dallas Jahncke

Grand Rapids, MI. Bethany House Publishers: 2012

Kluck gets paired with Dallas through his church's (University Reformed Church in Lansing, Mich.) commitment to the Lansing City Rescue Mission, the halfway house where Dallas was living after spending time in a psychiatric hospital. Kluck's job is to meet with Dallas and disciple him as he transitions into society. Kluck is given this job because his church thinks he can handle rougher characters; he has, after all, worked with tough boxers like Mike Tyson in the past.

Kluck's first meeting with Dallas gives the reader an indication that this is not going to be "mentorship by the book." They meet in a coffeeshop, Kluck having ordered his tall, skinny decaf mocha, waiting for the heavily tattooed Dallas. After Dallas arrives, he shares some of his life story with Ted, but they soon realize that they will need a reason to get together besides to drink lattes and share feelings. So, even though Kluck has no experience with fixing cars, they decide to buy and rebuild an older European sports car.

The rest of the book follows a one-year period, where Ted and Dallas meet on the occasional weekend to work on the 1974 Triumph when Dallas is home from a strict Bible college that he attends in Northern Michigan. Kluck recounts the joys, blessings, and trials that follow his relationship with Dallas, as he helps Dallas grow in his decision-making and walk with Christ. In return, Dallas helps Ted learn how to fix cars, while finding in Kluck an older male he can call at anytime of day (and as you read the book, you find out he does) to talk.

The book is mostly written from Kluck's perspective, and his humorous tone and ability to poke fun at both himself and church culture help keep the book lively even while discussing more serious subject matter. Kluck is able to show how difficult yet rewarding mentoring Dallas can be, and he demonstrates a servant-like humility by never elevating himself to a position of power over Dallas. While this is a story of Kluck and Dallas' relationship, I felt like I too was benefitting from Kluck's words of wisdom and advice.

Transitioning back into society, especially while attending a strict school is not easy for Dallas, and he shares his struggles in personal essays interspersed throughout the book. Yet in these struggles, you find a man passionate about God and doing the right thing, even in the midst of great temptation. As Dallas, with the help of Kluck's mentorship, learns to cope with rules, expectations and little cash flow, he begins to thrive at school, at one point even telling Kluck that he never knew he could "have so much fun with fundamentalists!"

I enjoyed this book because it tackles a topic I've been contemplating since I was a Youth Director – how does the church do male mentorship well? I have not seen a better example than the one presented in *Dallas and the Spitfire*. While Kluck readily admits that this book is not a blueprint, it is a helpful tool that the church can use to shape a vital ministry. The idea that Kluck and Dallas put forward is that discipleship between men is easier to do when they are doing something together. Many men are more at ease talking while doing an activity like building a deck or golfing than they are sitting together in a coffee shop.

I strongly recommend this book to any male Christian serious about discipleship. The church is in dire need of strong male leaders, and establishing mentorship programs founded on principles in this book will go far in furthering the ministries and work of Christ's church.

Tom Deelstra (tmdeelstra@gmail.com) is excited to be teaching at Chatham Christian School in the fall.



Ted Kluck



A story of male mentorship done well

Tom Deelstra

Author Ted Kluck is a leading voice in the Reformed movement today, and is most famously known as co-author with Kevin DeYoung of *Why We're Not Emergent*, and *In Praise of Organized Religion: Why We Love the Church*. He is also a sports writer, having written about boxing and football. This book is much different than his previous offerings. In this book, Kluck recalls the time he spent mentoring Dallas Jahncke, a troubled adolescent who had a criminal record and no fixed address.

Kluck gets paired with Dallas through his church's (University Reformed Church in Lansing, Mich.) commitment to the Lansing City

Features

The War of 1812: The British-Native alliance – a formidable team

Linda Jonasson

Even though I have lived within a few miles of Canada's largest Native Reserve (Six Nations on the Grand River) for 19 years, I have only visited there once. My interaction with Natives has been limited. I did work with a friendly Native custodian at an elementary school in Paris, Ont. in the 1990s. I also attended a weekly Coffee Break at my Brantford church last year with a kind Native woman from North Dakota. I thought it was about time I learned more about the Six Nations.

The Six Nations, known as the Iroquois by the French and Haudenosaunee by the Natives themselves, consist of the Mohawk, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora Nations. Their original territory was not located along the Grand River, but in what is now New York State. Under the leadership of Joseph Brant some of the Six Nations peoples migrated to Canada as United Empire Loyalists after the American Revolution, and were granted 950,000 acres of land in the Haldimand Proclamation (six miles on either side of the Grand River from its source to its mouth) by the British Crown for their loyalty. When the War of 1812 broke out, the Six Nations faced a difficult choice: to side with Britain or America?

In 1812 the American militia far outnumbered the British and Canadian colonial forces, to the point that Thomas Jefferson famously declared that "the acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighbourhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching." Furthermore, three-fifths of Upper Canadians were newly-arrived Americans who were not exactly British patriots. However, Jefferson was not counting on one factor: the British-Native Alliance. Ten thousand Natives from two dozen Nations fought in more than 40 battles in the War of 1812. What follows are descriptions of three key battles in which they participated.

Queenston Heights

On Oct. 13, 1812 an American militia faced heavy artillery fire from the British as they crossed the Niagara River, forcing many of them back. Some American soldiers simply refused to fight on foreign soil. The soldiers that crossed successfully met four companies of British regulars and colonial militia at Queenston Heights. Several hours later, General Brock decided to lead a second charge up the escarpment to regain his gun position, but this time he was shot in the heart and killed by a sniper. The Mohawks, under Chief John Norton (a half-Scot, half-Cherokee who was adopted by the Mohawks), arrived along with a group



John Norton

Interesting facts:

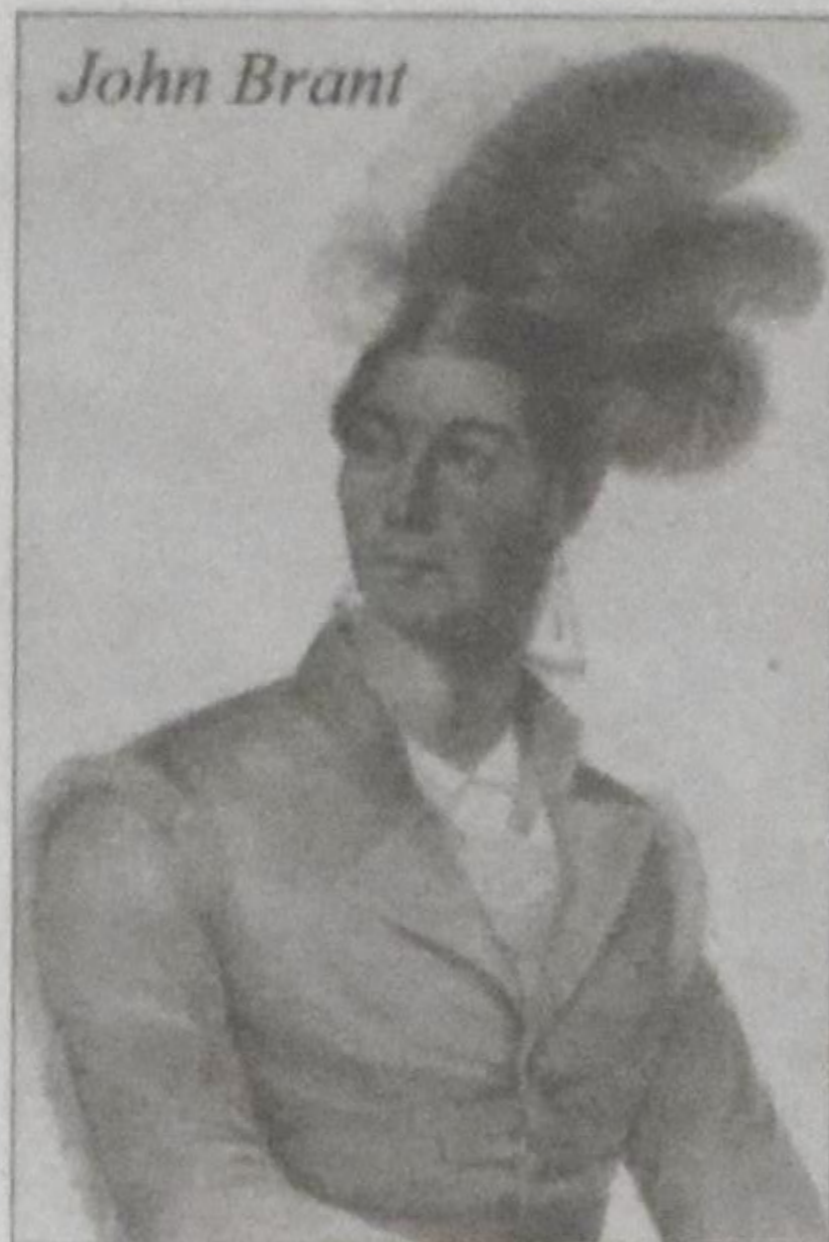
- On December 30, 1813, John "Smoke" Johnson claims to have kindled the fire which burned the city of Buffalo.



- In 1830, John Brant became the first Native to be elected to the Upper Canada Legislature. He passed away in 1832 and is buried beside his father at Mohawk Chapel.

- In 1886, John "Smoke" Johnson was present at the laying of the cornerstone of Joseph Brant Monument in Brantford's Victoria Park, which would be made from two melted down cannons from the War of 1812.

John Brant



of British reinforcements under the command of Major-General Roger Sheaffe. Norton advised Sheaffe to climb the escarpment further downriver and out of sight of the American forces, enabling the British and Native reinforcements to outflank and surprise the Americans at the top.

Norton gave the following account of the battle: "We rushed forward and saw the Grenadiers led by Lieutenant Bullock ... the enemy disappeared under the Bank; many plunging into the [Niagara] River. The inconsiderate still continued to fire at them [in the water] until checked by repeated commands of 'Stop fire.' The white flag from the American general then met General Sheaffe.... The prisoners amounted to about 900." In addition to his military accomplishments, Norton also translated the Gospel of John into Mohawk; he was a Christian who attended Mohawk Chapel, Upper Canada's oldest Protestant church.

Also present at the battle of Queenston Heights was John Brant, the son of Joseph Brant. Other noteworthy Native participants included John "Smoke" Johnson, the grandfather of poet Pauline Johnson, and John Tutela, who cut and carved a hickory stick, a symbol of chieftainship, which he later gave to the Canadian Inspector of Indian Agencies.

Stoney Creek

The Natives struck fear in the hearts of the Americans. As John Askin, a prominent Canadian fur trader and merchant, explained: "In the woods where the Americans must pass, one Indian is equal to three white men." The Natives knew the terrain of Upper Canada well. They practised guerrilla warfare – ambushing, sabotaging and hit and run raids that always kept the Americans guessing. In June 1813, the Americans secretly set up camp at the Gage Farm in Stoney Creek, intending on ambushing the British. However, 19-year-old Billy Green discovered their position and warned the British.

The Natives sent scouts to stake out the woods before the battle at Stoney Creek. The British silently advanced towards the American camp in the darkness on the morning of June 6, until a Native warrior under the command of John Norton shot a bow and arrow and struck an American soldier. A group of British staff officers let out a



1882 studio portrait of the surviving Six Nations warriors who fought in the War of 1812. (r to l:) Sakawaraton, a.k.a. John "Smoke" Johnson, John Tutela and Young Warner.

How to observe the War of 1812 bicentennial

- Eat "Redcoat Rations" ice cream at Hewitts Dairy in Hagersville, Ont.
- Attend a War of 1812 re-enactment at an Upper Canada fort or Pioneer Village.
- Visit "The Encampment" at Fort York, a group of 200 tents full of artwork portraying war stories (30 tents tell about Native experiences).
- Visit the Woodland Cultural Centre's exhibit "War Clubs & Wampum Belts" (Oct. 29 to Dec. 24, 2012).

cheer, and inadvertently revealed their position. Fighting ensued. Major Charles Plenderleath and his British troops charged the American guns before the Americans could reload; then, referring to John Brant, he yelled "Come on, Brant!" In the melee, the British and Natives were able to capture the American Generals William Winder and John Chandler, and John Brant almost killed the American Colonel Winfield Scott. Disoriented by the darkness, the Americans started to fire on each other. According to the historian Carl Benn, "Every leaf on every tree [seemingly] turned into a Native" at the battle of Stoney Creek. Thinking they were outnumbered, and without proper leadership, the Americans fell back and retreated to 40 Mile Creek (Grimsby). As a result of the battle, the British regained control of the Niagara Frontier.

Beaver Dams

A local legend about the Battle of Beaver Dams, which took place on June 24, 1813 holds that "the Caughnawaga [Mohawks converted to Christianity by Jesuits] got the victory, the Mohawks got the plunder and FitzGibbon got the credit." Prior to the battle, Laura Secord made the gruelling 19 mile trek from Queenston through the Black Swamp and up a rocky ridge to the British Headquarters at Beaver Dams to warn Lieutenant FitzGibbon about the impending American ambush. Near the end of her journey, Secord got lost and came upon a group of Natives. When she conveyed to the chief that she was looking for FitzGibbon, he sent two men from the Six Nations on the Grand to guide her, John Tutela and Young Warner. Secord warned Lieutenant FitzGibbon about the impending American attack, and he arranged an army of 300 Caughnawaga and 100 Mohawks to meet the Americans. The Natives ambushed a column of American soldiers who were walking along Mountain Road above the Niagara Escarpment, popping out of the woods to attack and sending the Americans into disarray. Lieutenant FitzGibbon arrived at the end of the two-hour battle, and contemplated surrendering since his troops were outnumbered. However, in a daring psychological manoeuvre, FitzGibbon warned the Americans that more Natives were coming and that in order to avoid a slaughter they should surrender. His ruse worked.

Continuing Legacy

Although the Native Reserve in my own backyard, Six Nations on the Grand, has shrunk to a shadow of its former size (46,000 acres), we should not forget the monumental contributions to the war effort of its ancestral members. Military allies like Brant and Norton are well-known for their significant roles in the War of 1812. But we should also remember the efforts of the "unknowns," warriors like Johnson, Tutela and Warner, who played their supportive and loyal part. Without them, Jefferson's 200-year-old prediction might have come true and the stars and stripes would be flying over this land today.

Linda Jonasson is an elementary school teacher and writer. She lives with her family in Brantford, Ont. and attends Hope CRC. She blogs at alinefromLinda.blogspot.com.



Features

Steve van de Hoef: seeking justice for Canada's First Nations

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Several months ago, I participated in a learning tour of the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory led by Steve van de Hoef, who has been the Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer for Canadian Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) since July 2010. Recently, I interviewed him to learn about what his job entails.

How did God lead you to take up your present role?

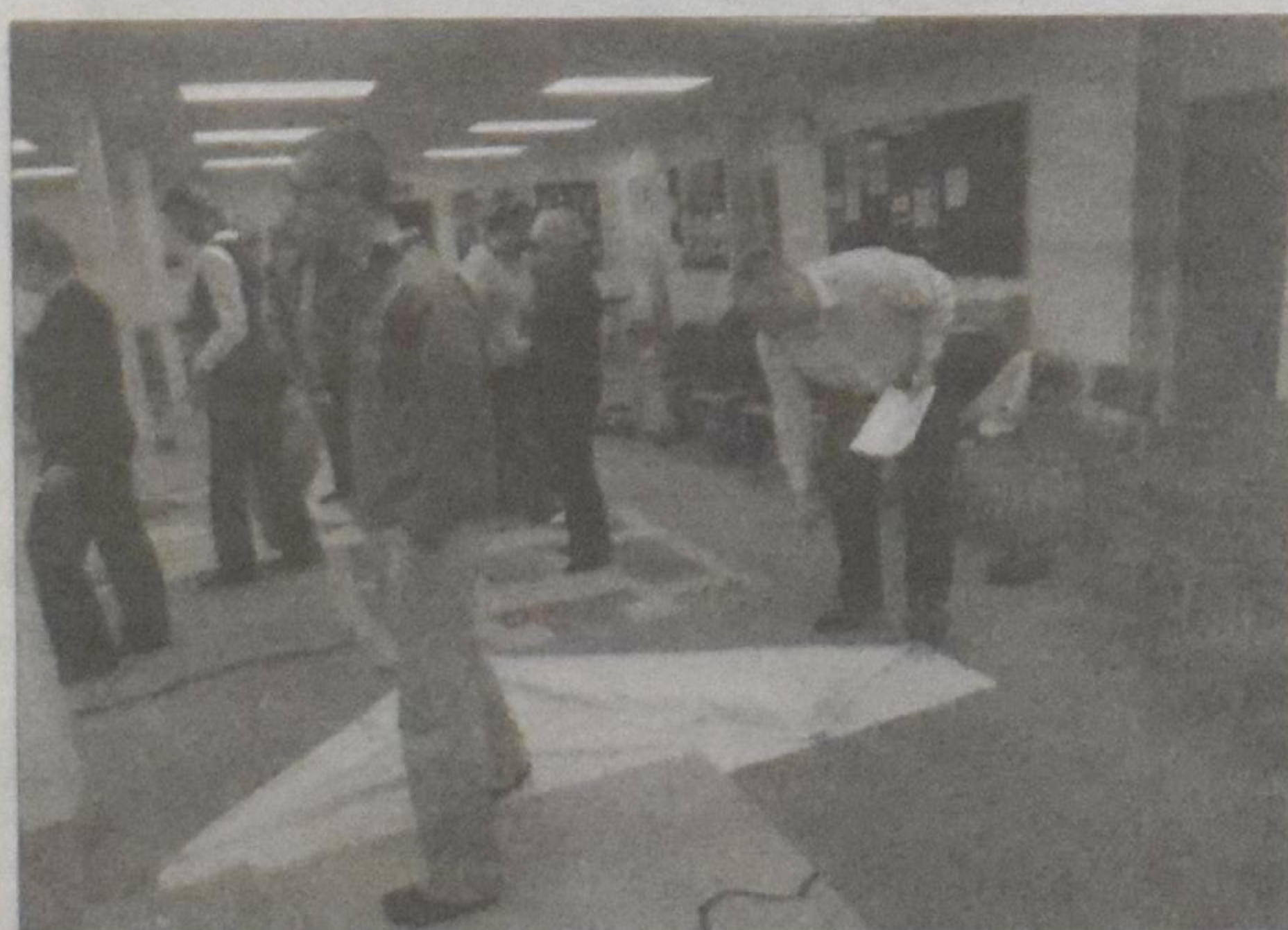
Social justice became increasingly important to my Christian walk and witness while I was at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. and as I began to investigate and claim my own faith. I was looking for a faith that was relevant to what I saw around me, the beauty and the brokenness. I met people in whom I saw faith applied to the social concerns that I found compelling – hunger and food security, homelessness, and peace building. It was in wrestling with how Christian faith applied to these things that I rediscovered the Reformed tradition. During a course in Peace Studies, I encountered the CRC's Synodical Report on War and Peace, which emphasized God's call to "seek peace and pursue it," rather than on when and if a given war could be justified. This appealed to me, and I began to get involved with the CRC's research and advocacy work concerning Canada's growing role in NATO's mission in Afghanistan. It was several years later that I actually saw the job posting for my current position and decided to apply.

What does your job entail?

My role as Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer is to support and encourage CRC churches in Canada in responding to God's call to do justice, seek peace, and live as ministers of reconciliation. I see my role as a facilitator: giving voice to God's call to justice, and being a partner and resource for individuals, groups and churches to empower them as they respond to this call. I work with the CRC's Office of Social Justice, Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee, and Centre for Public Dialogue.

In your work with these organizations, how do you go about empowering CRC members and churches in Canada to faithfully seek justice and reconciliation with First Nations peoples?

Practically speaking, I regularly facilitate the Blanket Exercise, which illuminates the historical context of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. I am also coordinating the reForming Relationships art tour which creates space for learning and relationship building between CRC members and congregations and their Indigenous neighbours. I prepare communication materials and resources to inform CRC churches and members about topics of justice and reconciliation, and also participate in ecumenical justice work.



Steve leading the Blanket Exercise at First CRC, Edmonton.



Canadian Aboriginal Ministry Committee in Victoria, B.C.

ciliation, and also participate in ecumenical justice work.

The purpose behind these activities is to create space for dialogue and action on God's call to justice and reconciliation. I do not bring God's call; it is already extended to each congregation and believer. Nor can I provide definitive answers for how a particular person or church community should respond to God's call to justice and peace; it is their responsibility to discern how to faithfully respond to God's call. My job is to provide opportunity for that process, and to help along the way as needed. This does not mean, of course, that I am unbiased or a disinterested observer. I work on issues and perspectives that are consistent with the positions of the CRC, and encourage congregations to reflect and act on those positions. However, my primary role and responsibility is that of a facilitator.

What has been the response of the churches to your initiatives?

Naturally, there are a range of responses. Overall, I would say that the response is positive, and that CRC members (and others) are interested and engaged in learning how to act faithfully for justice and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours. Many church members (and Canadians in general) are unaware of the history of treaties, of oppressive legislation and policies of assimilation, and of the impact of residential schools. I frequently hear people say that their attitude or understanding has changed after participating in the Blanket Exercise. However, relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada are complex, with a history of hurt and perceived injustice on both sides. So when I present a history of relationships and identify root causes of some of the social problems and frictions that we see, there can also be skepticism and criticism.

A common criticism that I hear is: "It's in the past. Can't we move on?" Yes and no. I recently attended the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's hearings in Victoria, B.C., witnessing firsthand the stories of former residential school students – stories of forced separation from parents, language and culture, of abuse and despair. Later that week, I spent time with a First Nations man at the site of a former residential school in his community. I listened to him tell of the school's destructive impact on his parents and siblings and of the abuse that he suffered as a result, even though he himself had not attended residential school. In both cases, it was quite evident to me that the destructive impact of residential schools is not just in the past, but still very much in the present. It is very important for me to share, though, that amidst these stories of pain and loss, there were also stories of resilience

and hope. These are places where God's grace is evident, where we as Christians can live as ambassadors of reconciliation and restoration.

Do you feel hopeful that the church is willing to respond to God's call to peace and justice with our First Nations neighbours?

Yes, I am convinced that the church is willing and, indeed, already responding faithfully to God's call to justice, peace and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours. This is true of the CRC as it is of the church as a whole. There are many ways in which individuals, congregations and the CRC as a denomination are seeking and living out right relationships with our Indigenous neighbours: the CRC operates three Urban Aboriginal Ministries (in Regina, Winnipeg, and Edmonton); individuals and congregations are reaching out to Indigenous people and communities through the reForming

Relationships art tour, and in other contexts; members build relationships with First Nations friends, students or co-workers, acting in solidarity with Indigenous people and communities and sharing Christ's love in their personal and professional lives. I am confident that the church continues to be willing, and, indeed, must respond faithfully to God's call. As one of my colleagues regularly says, the integrity of the church in Canada is directly linked to justice, reconciliation, and wholeness in relationship with the Indigenous peoples of this land.

How do you deal with the concern some Christians raise about the danger of syncretism – compromising and watering down Christian beliefs to accommodate Native spirituality?

My response to this concern is quite simple: when culture transforms Christ, that is idolatry; when Christ transforms culture, that is redemption and restoration.

Concerns of syncretism imply that there is a "true" expression of Christianity that is watered down or compromised by another's culture or cultural practices. However, the truths of God and the gospel are always and inevitably received and expressed in culturally-embedded ways – that is, they are always culturally contextualized.

Contextualization is not wrong in and of itself. It is a celebration of God's revelation in the "third book" of culture, providing a lens for a deeper understanding of God's goodness and grace in all areas of our life. However, it becomes a serious problem when we fail to acknowledge our own cultural lens and equate "true" Christianity with our own cultural ways of being Christian. That is to say, if we are blind to the ways in which we ourselves contextualize the gospel, we begin to think of our expression of Christianity as the right and proper way, even though it is but one of many culturally-embedded ways of being Christian. This is a toxic fault; indeed, the history of colonialism and paternalism in Canada can be traced to precisely these kinds of assumptions.

In saying this, I am not downplaying the potential for syncretism or its destructive effects on faithful Christian living. I am simply saying that it is an issue for all of us, regardless of culture, and suggesting that as Christian communities we should discern and remove the plank in our own eye before accusing our neighbour of syncretism. Often, being in contact and dialogue with Christians from other cultures with their own cultural expression of Christian faith is a helpful and healthy way to ensure that our own cultural expression does not fall prey to syncretism.

See Seeking justice p. 13

Features

Reforming relationships with our Native neighbours

Mike Wagenman

Almost every Christian knows Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan – as well as the moral to the story: that we're supposed to help people in need. But what many Christians struggle with is the same question which sparked the parable in the first place: Who is my neighbour? Typically, we think of our neighbour as the person living literally next door to us. And, yes, Jesus calls us to serve them. Or maybe it's a co-worker, someone who doesn't live near us but who falls within our "sphere of life." And, yes, Jesus calls us to meet them in their time of need, too.

Good though they are, these are individual responses to the parable. They're gracious and generous acts of charity. Might it be possible that Jesus intends more for us with this parable than one-on-one acts of kindness? To ask this systemic or community-based question pushes us out of the realm of charity and into the realm of justice. To frame the parable in its wider context, we might ask: Who suffers injustice that Jesus calls me and my community to address structurally, officially, even politically? For Canadians, one of the first answers to that question is Canada's First Nations communities.

On Sunday, June 3, Redeemer Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, Ont. invited a local United Church of Canada congregation and the residents of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation to their evening service. At that service, the walls of the sanctuary were covered by the many paintings which comprise *Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice* by Cree artist Ovide Bighetty.

Exploring issues together

This evening was part of the Christian Reformed Church's reForming Relationships art tour which seeks to "create space for listening, learning, dialogue, and building relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada." On this particular evening, a capacity attendance listened to myself (the white/European voice) and Rev. Matthew Stevens of the United Church of Canada (the Aboriginal/Inuit/Metis voice) discuss the history and contemporary issues related to Canada's relationships with the first inhabitants of Turtle Island (North America).

Together we explored the church's part in this historical and ongoing drama. It was standard orthodoxy that

any new lands the Europeans "discovered" could be "conquered" for the church. It meant that forced education in residential schools was acceptable. The intentional stripping of cultural practices from individuals, families, or communities was expected. The "civilization" of North America was believed to be God's will – for the church and the government.

In order to address the abuses and injustices of the past, the church today is seeking new paths of reconciliation, forgiveness, and partnership with Canada's First Nations. Part of walking this path involves recognizing that the Government as well as the church have misunderstood and abused its power at times in history. This led to the Prime Minister's apology to the survivors of Residential Schools on June 11, 2008. The Christian Reformed Church was not directly involved in Residential Schools, but the United Church of Canada was and has sought to communicate its apology in 1986, 1997 and 2000.

But admitting theological and practical error is always difficult. So events like this help church and Aboriginal communities come together to discern the way forward together. It's one thing for the administrative leaders of denominations to offer words of apology; it's another matter entirely when alienated communities begin to partner together in renewed ways. The Christian Reformed Church is one community which is implementing this biblical mandate through events like this all across the country.

Part of what we discovered that June evening in Sarnia was that we all – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together – live downstream from the European colonization of North America. Both Native and non-Native children in Canada are taught to this day about the history of Canada in ways that perpetuate stereotypes, power dynamics, and ways of living separately. Some have even gone so far as to call this a North American form of apartheid that continues right under our noses.

Starting points

Many have started wondering where we go from here. Kairos, an ecumenical Christian justice advocacy organization, has generously made their many resources available to member churches (kairoscanada.org). And the Centre for Public Dialogue in Ottawa facilitates the



Committee member Diane Plug giving a guided art tour at Redeemer CRC.

Blanket Exercise, an interactive hands-on re-enactment of the history of Native and non-Native interactions from First Contact to the present – a powerful immersion into the history many non-Native peoples know nothing about. These are examples of great starting points for churches to grapple with this important issue.

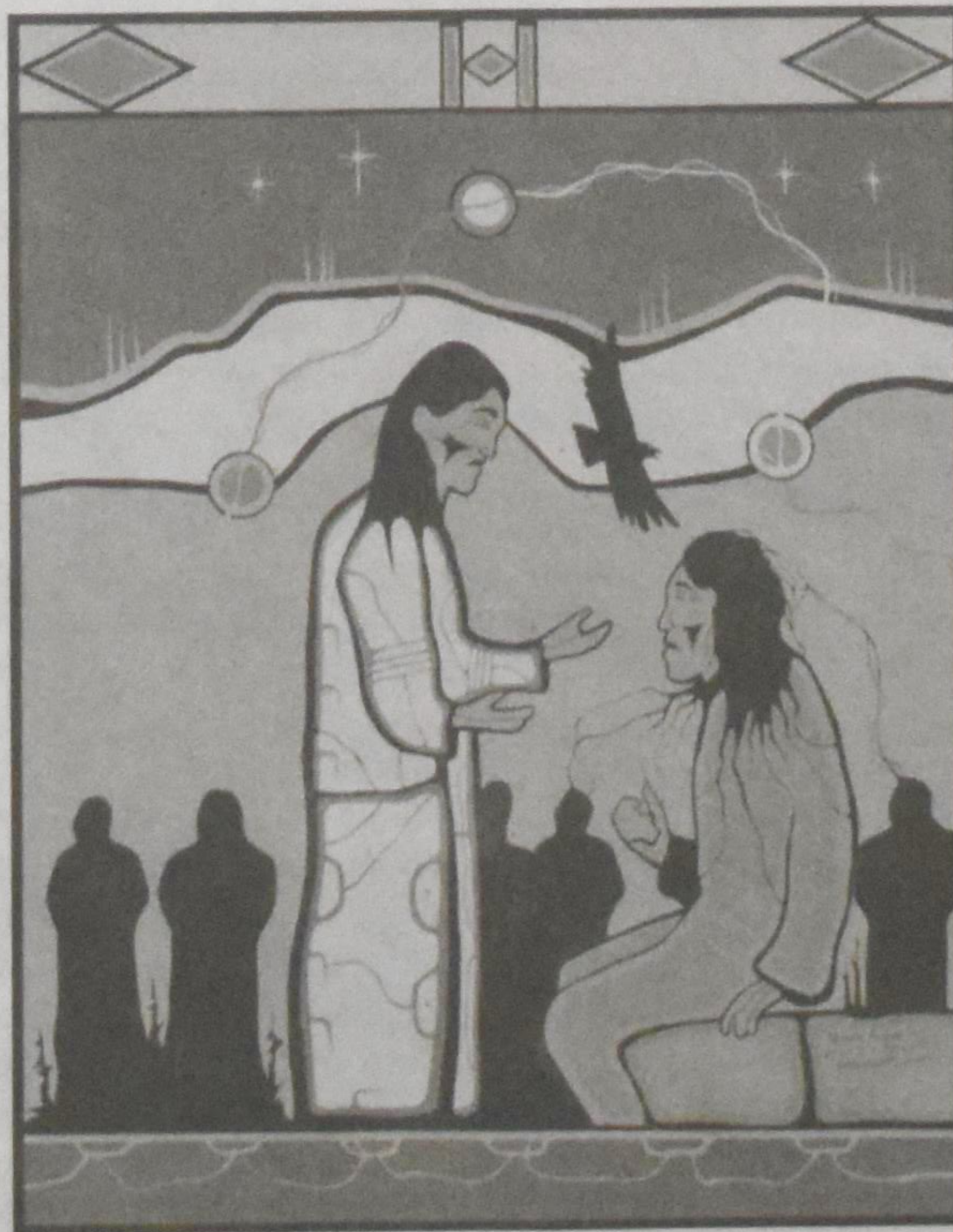
Can Turtle Island become a home to such diverse peoples today? How might the God of all the nations be calling us to learn to live in peace and harmony with all our neighbours? For all of us, it begins by noticing who our neighbours are. All across our country, First Nations reserves and Christian churches are literal neighbours. And Christ calls us to love and serve them – and that through confessing our sins, receiving forgiveness, seeking reconciliation, and serving our neighbours, we are actually coming face to face with Jesus himself.

For more information on the reForming Relationships art tour, go to reformingrelationships.ca. The paintings are on display this summer until August 18th at Redeemer University College.

Mike Wagenman is the Director of the Kuyper Centre at Western University in London, Ont., a Christian Reformed campus ministry with a heart for justice. He can be reached at mwagenma@uwo.ca.



Betrayal



Peter's Failure



Because He Lives, We Can Face Tomorrow

Features

Intangible Things



Heidi Vander Slikke



I round the corner on my motorbike and am surprised at the sight of dark clouds dominating the southern sky. For the moment I'm still riding in sunshine, but lightning forks in the distance convince me to head for the farm.

A few fat raindrops smack my windshield and I think of my freshly cleaned windows at home. I would gladly see them rain spattered, if it meant relief from this month of drought and sweltering temperatures.

I reach home without needing to put on my rain gear. Black clouds loom overhead and the wind batters the trees. The parched grass crunches under my feet as I dash to pull laundry off the line and tuck away lawn furniture. I pull the big shed door shut and tighten the clamps. Stepping outside I look up at the sky and mutter, "Bring it on."

But nothing happens. Eventually the clouds disperse. The wind subsides. We get no rain – not a drop. An hour later all is calm and the air is considerably more comfortable.

Rocky emerges from the shop. I asked the groomer to shave his heavy fur right down to the woolly undercoat. He now looks a little like a goat with a collie face, but it helps him cope with the heat. I hook him up to his leash and we trot down the lane. For the first time in a week it's cool enough to enjoy an evening walk.

On the western horizon the sun is a fiery orange ball. It peers between lids of thick lavender clouds – like the eye of the Almighty watching over the evening.

Praying for rain

We head down the pathway between the cornfields. The plants tower well over my head, fully tasselled already – premature for this time of year. They've shifted into drought mode. The bottom foliage is withered; all available moisture is redirected to the top of the plant. The broad top leaves are tightly furled and point sharply upward. It prevents evaporation through the leaf surface and provides a type of eavestrough so that every precious drop of rain that might fall will travel straight to the heart of the plant.

Nothing new

The old timers will tell you they've seen it all before – endless winters filled with fierce blizzards and frigid temperatures, snowfall arriving before the trees have shed their leaves in autumn, raging spring floods and scorching summers. There's nothing new under the sun.

We reach the low level crossing at the creek. I could easily walk across on the stones without getting my feet wet. The deeper areas have turned into stagnant ponds where water lilies float between patches of algae. A heron flies silently overhead. It can't be easy finding fish right now.

I think back to the droughts of 1988 and



Most of the creek bed is dry.



Goatdog.

'89. I walked along the bone dry creek bed during those summers with my kids. With morbid fascination we explored what was normally underwater terrain. I wondered if there would ever

be any fish in the creek again, and worried that the canola crop might abort for lack of rain. A new house had strapped us financially and every penny mattered. In the end we had reasonable yields and managed to pay the bills.

The collie-goat and I return to the barnyard. I breathe deeply, savouring the warm air and the distinctive scent of the corn plants. With the tassels full out and the dying leaves it smells like fall, although it's only July. Cobs abound, but will there be enough moisture to fill them out?

Still, in almost 35 years of farming, we've only ever lost one corn crop. That was back in '93, after a summer of constant rain and cold temperatures. Why, I recall Jack combining the soybeans in November that year, sometime after the first snowfall.

Good grief! I'm turning into an old timer.

That's okay. With age comes experience. I've seen enough to know this much: God is good. He doesn't guarantee a harvest, but he does assure us of his presence and provision come what may. This

is the God who brought water from a rock and fed his people with manna and quail in the desert. As one old timer put it recently, we'll get every drop of rain ordained for us.

It takes faith to trust our Father when the situation looks grim, and still greater faith to be thankful even when the outcome isn't what we hoped for.

Jack often says it isn't over until the crop is either in the bin or plowed back into the ground. Meanwhile, I admit I'm hoping the Lord won't put my faith to the test. And I'm praying for rain. Maybe God will send showers, just in the nick of time.

I've seen it before. ➤

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Seeking justicecontinued from p. 11

What have the First Nations Christians you have met taught you about justice, reconciliation, and walking with Jesus?

Yes, I have met a number of Christian Indigenous people, some of whom I consider friends, and I have learned many things from them. I don't think it's possible to separate what I have learned from them as Indigenous persons from what I have learned from them as friends and Christian

individuals. My friend Harold has given me a deeper understanding and appreciation of God as Creator and Sustainer. My friend Michelle has shown me how gifts from her Indigenous culture enrich the body of Christ. My friend Matt exemplifies appropriate pride in culture – in who God made him. My friend Terry reminds me that good words and good theology, however true and well-articulated, are meaningless if they are not followed by action. From others I have heard the call to justice and learned that this call always has a human face. I have learned over and over again that there cannot be reconciliation without justice, and that I cannot truly live as Christ's ambassador without urgently seeking justice in my individual relationships and in our institutional and societal structures.

In the last months, the media has drawn attention to Attawapiskat and other First Nations communities due to their housing crises. What role do you think the Canadian government should play in solving First Nations' problems?

This question is far too large to be answered adequately in a brief interview. Generally speaking, it is necessary for the tone of the discussion to change. For example, I am uncomfortable with the wording of this question and the assumptions it makes. I would prefer to ask: what is the Canadian federal government's responsibility toward Indigenous peoples in Canada?

The language of "responsibility" subverts notions of charity or benevolence – that the government, on behalf of Canadians, cares for Indigenous people as a matter of sympathy or moral obligation to "help." In fact, this is a matter of justice. The government's actions must be guided by an ethos of partnership and mutual respect with the goal of empowering Indigenous peoples to achieve their self-determined goals and directions.

It is important to observe that governments do not lead, they follow. Public opinion and public attitudes matter. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to be informed and engaged citizens as we respond to God's call to seek justice and reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours. ➤

Resources

reForming Relationships art tour: reformingrelationships.ca and facebook.com/reformingrelationships

Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue: www.crcna.ca/publicdialogue
CRC Canadian Aboriginal Ministry: crcna.ca/aboriginal

The Blanket Exercise: www.crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue_blankets.cfm

Truth and Reconciliation Commission: trc.ca

"The Gospel Comes to North America" by Rev. Mark MacDonald – an excellent resource on contextualization and Indigenous Christian faith in Canada
"Dance the Reconciliation Dance" by Harold Roscher

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives: kairoscanada.org/dignity_rights/indigenous_rights/
CBC "8th Fire" documentary series on reconciliation: cbc.ca/8thfire

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



Harold Roscher (Director, Edmonton Native Healing Centre) drums with Indigenous children at Kids Culture Camp.

Columns

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



Motherhood comes with benefits and sacrifices; I knew that in advance. I benefit from a downy head to nuzzle in the morning after sacrificing a sound night of sleep. But there are a few things I didn't expect to lay on the altar of save-that-for-another-year, things I normally love. I made this sad discovery during our first family camping trip on the Father's Day weekend.

It all began with the heat. Ordinarily, this would be a good thing. I love sun and have been known to be quite petulant over cool weather on vacation. This year, between hormones and a few extra baby pounds, I find I am hot all the time. Add to this a steamy, roly polly six-month-old needing to be fed, and things get tense. I never imagined that nursing could be so traumatic: the baby slides around in my arms, stuck to me on the underside by a mutual layer of sweat, uncomfortably trying to get suction on a slippery surface and wriggling in frustration. This makes us both hotter, and madder. Truly, the last thing I want to do in 30-degree weather is hold my baby, let alone feed her. I suspect she feels the same, but there we are, locked in our sweaty symbiosis. At one point I tried to cool her down by laying her on a sleeping bag in the shade, completely naked. I sat in my lawn

chair, eyeing her enviously.

The normal antidote to high temperatures is water, my favourite part of vacationing. But this year, beach time is pretty much out. There is nowhere to put the baby. She doesn't sit up yet and isn't keen on lying around, and trying to keep sand or sandy objects out of her mouth... well it's just not worth the effort. My lawn chair sits enticing and vacant. Swimming is even worse. Once I've wrangled the slick, sunscreened baby into her bathing suit, propped her on my hip and made it down to the water, my challenge has only begun. As soon as I am deep enough to cool myself, I get a quick lesson in baby physics: her body is much lighter than her head, and now my chief aim in swimming is trying to keep her the right way up. It conjures images of trying to roll a greased piglet onto its back, not that I've ever tried that. Did I mention the lake was full of leeches?

All of these inconveniences would be minor hilarities if it weren't for THE PROBLEM. Sleep. Cozied up in her bed at home with the air conditioner running, the sleep sheep lisping ocean waves, the curtains and blinds shut tight, I'm lucky to get four consecutive hours of sleep before a cry sounds. In the trailer, mosquitoes humming, campfire smoke wafting through the screens, the raucous neighbours cracking into their second case of beer and playing

A season for everything... even camping



Camping with baby isn't easy.

laser games with their flashlights, it takes a herculean effort to get her even to lie down. The first night she fell asleep at 11:00 and woke up in one-hour intervals thereafter. If I was able to fall asleep at all between, it was fitful at best, full of intense dreams about the baby's hands getting frostbitten and saving her from tornadoes.

Lastly, there were the other moms. We camped with two other families with older children, and although they were lovely, well-intentioned women, I didn't come up well by comparison. They descended from their hard-topped, air conditioned trailers in the morning, groomed with freshly brewed mugs of coffee in hand, their children helping with breakfast dishes or off biking with

friends. They gently suggested perfectly logical ideas for coping with a hot baby – ideas that should have occurred to me, the mother. “Why don't you try letting her drink some water from a straw?” “You could take her diaper off and let her air out.” When we discovered a splinter in the baby's foot, I didn't even have long enough nails to pinch it out. One of the MOMS came to the rescue with her beautifully manicured fingers and the other held up a teddy bear to distract my baby while I sat there like a lump with my short, dirty fingernails, sweating. Did I mention that

my coffee was full of grounds and lukewarm by the time it made it to my mug? Did I mention the creatures we discovered in our trailer that looked an awful lot like cockroaches?

I think our next vacation will not involve a trailer. I think it will be in a nice hotel with a pool and air conditioning. There will be breakfasts at restaurants and hot coffee from shiny chrome machines. Come to think of it, maybe we'll just go ahead and leave the baby with her grandparents.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She has just finished and enjoyed Beneath the Veils of Yemen, by Audra Grace Shelby.

A class birthday party, South Africa style

Dora Strooboscher

In South Africa, every formal occasion follows a set format. It should therefore not have surprised us that a class birthday party would be the same.

Nicollin Mashele, a Grade 9 learner at Theocentric Christian College in Limpopo, South Africa decided that she would have a birthday party at school instead of at her home. That makes sense. All her friends are here and to transport them to her home would be costly and problematic. She made arrangements with her homeroom teacher the day before, and he agreed that she could use break time plus the following class period.

Nicollin's mother brought two birthday cakes, which were kept in the school library until the party began. Marc and I were invited along with three other teachers. Grade 9 has 38 learners so the classroom was crowded.

All formal events have a written program and a program director. That day, Somisa Masia was in charge. She read the agenda for the party and asked if there would be any additions. One young lady said she would like to sing a solo, and the homeroom teacher asked for permission to say a few words. The program director then announced that the program would begin.

1. *Opening prayer:* A male classmate thanks God for this day and for the life of Nicollin.
2. *Chorus:* Maggie Maluleke, one of the teachers who were invited, leads the class in a chorus: “The blood of Jesus shall never lose its power.”
3. *Purpose of this event:* The program director explains that we have come together to celebrate the life of Nicollin and to show her that she is loved by many.
4. *Solo:* A classmate sings: “All to Jesus I Surrender” as a gift to Nicollin.
5. *Chorus:* Maluleke starts another chorus: “We Glorify Your Holy Name.”
6. *Words from a teacher:* “Nicollin, you have shown us that you come from a good family. Your mother bought cakes and drinks just because she wanted you to have a good birthday even if she cannot be here. That shows she loves you very much because she did not even ask you to do anything. It is a gift of grace to you. What she has done has inspired me to do things like this for my kids even though they do not ask for it. It has inspired me to be a bet-

ter father. I also thank the class who organized this event. It shows you are responsible and that you can be in charge even if a teacher is not involved.”

7. *Chorus:* Maluleke begins and everyone joins in, an instant choir in four parts: “O yes, we thank you Lord, O yes, we thank you Lord, O yes, we thank you Lord, for the days of our life.”
8. *Poem:* A classmate has written an *Ode to Nicollin* and is given this time to read it.
9. *Response from Nicollin:* “I greet you all in the name of Jesus. Amen? I thank God, my parents, my friends and anyone who has made me feel special today. If I have ever wondered if I am special or not, I will never again after this day have any doubt. I thank especially my teachers. Even though you are not my family, you show that you love me and care for me. This is a very special day for me.”
10. *Cutting of the cake:* While this is taking place with the help of a best friend, we sing the English version of “Happy Birthday” followed by a rousing Tsonga blessing: “Xikwembu, xikwembu” (May God do miracles in your life!)

11. *Sharing food and drink:* While Nicollin and her friend pass out cake and drinks,

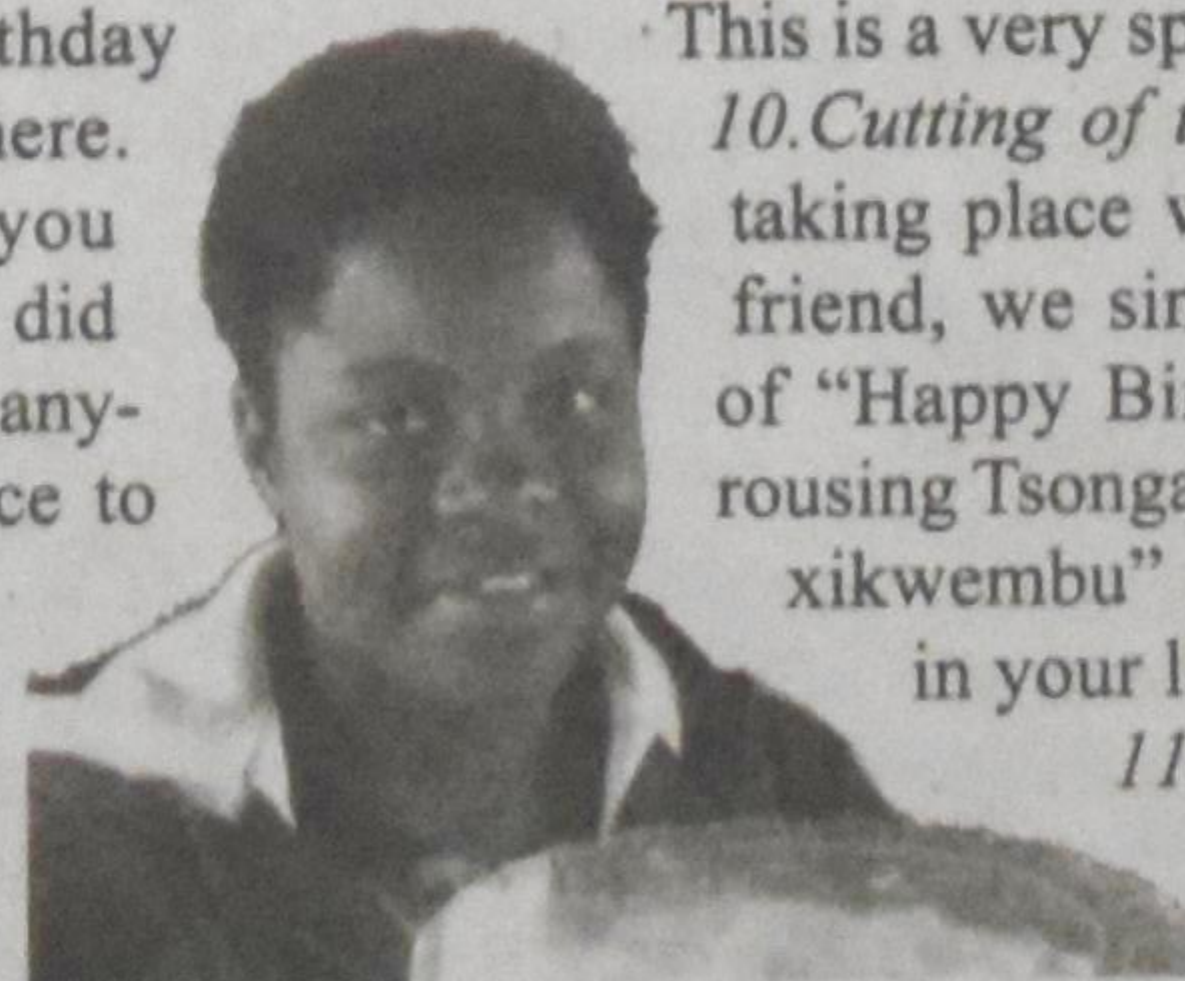
those present are invited to bring forward any present they might wish to give. Some give money, others a home made card, and all gifts are carefully recorded so proper thanks can be given.

12. *Vote of thanks* (some boys thought they would head outside before this but were promptly called back into the room by Maluleke; an event is not over until it is officially declared over by the program director): The program director thanks everyone who attended, anyone who participated in any way, and anyone who gave gifts.
13. *Closing prayer:* A classmate is asked to give a closing prayer. “Great and mighty God. Go with Nicollin as she goes on her way. Help her to stay with you always, because you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

The program director then declared the party over and the learners went to their next class.

Could some, or maybe all, of this become part of the way western teens celebrate their birthdays?

Dora Strooboscher and her husband Marc were in South Africa for the months of January, February and March on behalf of EduDeo, offering workshops and mentoring teachers in Theocentric Christian College, a black Christian high school.



The birthday girl, Nicollin.

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides



Michael Coren is probably the best-known Christian author, speaker and broadcaster in Canada. He is the author of 14 books and a syndicated newspaper column, and hosted a talk show on the Crossroads Television System from 1999 to 2011. He is currently the host of the Sun News Network evening talk show *The Arena*.

Coren is a convert to Roman Catholicism, and an ardent defender of evangelical Christianity. What enables him to thrive in the increasingly secular public domain are three characteristics: his strong Christian faith, verbal sure-footedness and sense of humour. He wades into the most controversial issues with a smile and a willingness to listen to and debate with those who disagree. He can rightly be called a "Happy Warrior."

Coren is convinced that there is a deep-seated bias against Christianity in the media, as well as in other elite strongholds of modernity where the Christian faith is often mocked and caricatured. *Heresy* was written to expose the lies against Christianity and to embolden Christians in living their faith without fear of being called hopelessly out-of-date. The author explains the purpose of his book as follows:

"[A]s a primer of logical Christian self-defence, as a handbook for followers of Christ who want to intellectualize the instinctive and provide a solid response to the increasingly malicious anti-Christian propaganda campaign, I hope this can be a guide and guard. My intention is to provide just a few metaphorical arrows, to be shot back at the snipers and the swordsmen who thrust and fire away so often."

Coren addresses ten frequently stated lies about Christianity: that it supported slavery, is racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-intellectual, anti-scientific and anti-Semitic, provokes war, resists progress, and is regressive and irrelevant.

Jesus did not exist

In chapter one, the author deals with the argument that Jesus did not exist and Christianity is a later creation. He explains that this issue is of paramount importance, for if Jesus did not actually exist, the Christian faith would be a fraud. (Here he echoes the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.)

Coren reviews numerous testimonies of secular and Christian writers who were contemporaries of Jesus and who confirmed his existence. Foremost are the testimonies of the apostles in the four Gospels, and the other 23 New Testament epistles written mostly by Paul, the turned-around, former persecutor of Christians.

Heresy: ten lies they spread about Christianity

The Da Vinci Code

Coren is convinced that this book by Dan Brown is a direct attack on the truth of the Bible, because it denies all the key tenets of the Christian faith. Although praised by even some Christians as a good read, Brown has stated that Jesus was no more than a great moral teacher, that he married Mary Magdalene, and that the Gnostic Gospels of Mary and Philip are trustworthy sources of information.

Christians are stupid

The other side of this coin is that all clever people are atheists. Coren lists a number of Christian world leaders in various areas of learning, including the sciences, who have made major contributions to the advancement of Western civilization. He begins with C.S. Lewis, who he describes as "one of the finest popular communicators of the Christian message and the Christian life who ever lived."

Lewis's friend and author J.R.R. Tolkien is famous for his *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. These fascinating stories have delighted millions with their strange creatures and curious plots, rich in Christian metaphors representing notions of value, virtue and truth.

Dorothy L. Sayers wrote, of all things, detective stories, as well as plays, and her radio drama, *The Man Born to be King*, was broadcast on the BBC over a 10-month period, which provoked opposition from atheist groups.

There is much, much more in Coren's book that will embolden the followers of Jesus. Coren minces no words in his defence of the unborn, the frail and the handicapped, as well as the traditional marriage and the family. He touches on church history, listing many outstanding Christian leaders and missionaries who gave of themselves unselfishly. They led the fight against slavery, ancient and modern, such as Nazism, Communism, and the current aggressive form of secularism within the West.

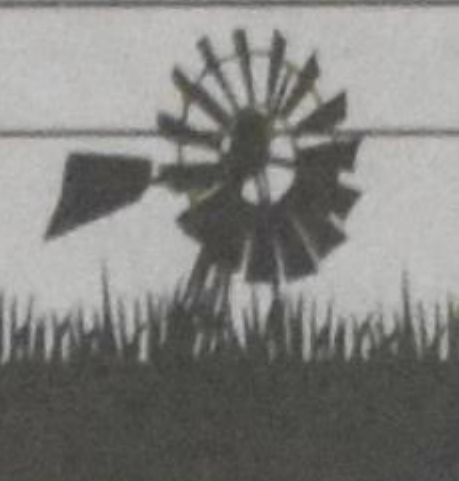
Coren tells the moving story of his great-grandmother Rose, who was Jewish, fleeing from the Russian-controlled part of Poland in the 1890s. She was pregnant and desperate when a hardened rough old captain, who would normally refuse to board a pregnant woman, made an exception for her. That is how she and her husband finally arrived in London, England, where she gave birth to Coren's grandmother, who gave birth to his father.

Think of it: without that act of kindness by a tough, old sea captain more than a century ago, this feisty defence of the Christian faith might never have seen the light of day.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) is the former director of research and education for the CLAC. He lives in Willowdale, Ont.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien



Do you ever feel you are bombarded with useless, flawed and misleading information? What always ruffles my feathers is the many articles I read about the average age of farm operators. For goodness' sake, the population is aging and it's just natural that the average age of farmers is going up a bit. Do we see statistics about the average age of carpenters, plumbers, tinsmiths or clergymen?

An article in the *Globe and Mail* said Canadian farmers have never been older, raising questions over who will produce the country's food in the coming decades. "For the first time on record, farmers in the 55-and over category comprise the highest percentage of total operators, Canada's 2011 census of agriculture shows," it said.

That's hard to believe. But it's good to know that the owners growing our food supply are experienced and mature. Tell us the average age of farmers who get 100 percent of their income from farming.



This farmer from China is still going strong. Ontario farmers are comparatively young.

An article in a farm paper last week said that the average age of farmers in Ontario is over 54 years. The article said that number is up from 53 in 2006, and 51 in 2001.

Ah, but Ontario farmers are young compared to the Japanese. And Quebec farmers are even younger. I did a Google search to see how other countries fare. Are there countries with mostly young food producers where operators retire at age 50 or so and draw a comfortable pension, just like some early retirees do here and are now enjoying life doing a "little hobby or lifestyle farming"?

The average age of farmers and fishermen in Japan is 66 years. It's 59 in the U.K., 58 in the U.S. and Australia and 57 in the Philippines. And do farmers in Spain retire early and sit along the Mediterranean relaxing? They average out at 55 years of age.

And hey, those Quebec farmers are younger than us baldies in Ontario. Their average age is only 51. That's probably because they have always had one farm organization so the provincial government listens to their needs. It entices the younger generation to stay on the land.

In British Columbia, where the climate is wetter and warmer, farm operators are the oldest in Canada at an average age of 55.7 years. They must be enjoying their

Farmers are in no rush to retire so why be concerned about their age?

work!

According to a recent BMO survey, 59 percent of Ontarians say the migration of young people from rural to urban communities has a negative impact on family farms.

Sure it does, and why is that? There are good reasons why young people aren't taking up farming. They'd love to if given a chance. If our supply managed marketing boards would loosen up their iron grip on protecting their producers and their turf, there would be an influx of bright young men and women wanting to get into farming. The marketing boards are worse than labour unions in that they protect their own with an iron fist.

Quota

A stable and profitable business opportunity means getting your hands on supply-managed commodity quota, but it's very expensive. It means the only new producers getting into raising broilers (meat birds) are dairy farmers who sell off part of their milk quota. Dairy quota is capped at \$25,000 per kilogram of butterfat – roughly the production of one cow per year. For broilers in Ontario, quota costs approximately \$74 per unit. That enables producers to sell 13 kg of broilers per year. Laying birds are \$170 per unit – that's the production of one hen per year. Turkey quota prices are not publicized but are said to be around \$7 per kg a year. The problem is you can't buy quota for a 500 or 1000 birds, and if you wanted to, you couldn't afford it.

In Ontario, producers are allowed to raise 100 laying hens, 300 broilers and 50 turkeys without quota. That was quite a fight to get the marketing boards to ease their grip a few years ago, thanks to some small producers and farm groups who persisted in getting those concessions from the marketing boards. But all of these "special cases" come with restrictions on how the poultry products can be marketed. The marketing board inspectors will watch over you once you buy the chicks. It's all recorded and sent to headquarters.

When I was a youngster in the 1950s and early 1960s, nearly every farm on our concession had an old grizzled man who spent his summers in bib overalls scything hay where the tractor and mower couldn't go, such as fence edges and ditches. Then it was raked with a wooden hand rake. They were always doing something around the farm. Those old-timers were tough as nails, had gnarled hands, smoked a pipe or chewed. And you never heard of anyone going to an "old age home." They stayed on the farm until they died. That wasn't just on our road, it was the norm on every concession.

So, please, no more stuff about how farmers have never been older.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew area farmer and agricultural writer.

Features

Unsettled

Cathy Smith

I'm reading *Unsettling the Settler Within* by UBC professor Paulette Regan. Regan argues that non-Aboriginal Canadians must undergo "decolonization" before any genuine reconciliation can occur with Aboriginal Peoples. Regan painstakingly presents her case with credibility borne from her experience as an Indian Residential Schools claims resolution manager for the federal government.

I'm unsettled. And not just by this book. The catalyst for my unease was serving on a grassroots committee to bring the CRC's reForming Relationships exhibition, *Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice*, to Sarnia.

I'm learning some things, about myself as a Christian, first of all, and secondly, about aboriginal issues. As a Christian, I'm learning to look within ... to examine whether I harbour prejudice. I live near Ipperwash and I have friends and family in Caledonia, the site of one of the more recent struggles involving First Nations people. Those conflicts colour my perceptions. But I haven't made much of an effort to know more, or to understand better. I haven't been a listener. If I want to have integrity as a Christian,

loving God and my neighbour, I need to cultivate an openness to, as Regan defines it, the "Other."

In a recent *Christian Courier* editorial, Michael Wagenman noted that "love is being slow to speak, quick to listen." He was writing about the development of a curriculum for faith-formation in young people that allows them to participate, that encourages them to be more than vessels into which we pour knowledge. Love isn't like "downloading information," he said. I agree. Love is enfolded in respectful relationships.

At our deepest levels of being we all want to be heard. Simple listening can be an affirming act. In a discussion, nothing is more frustrating than being shut down without an opportunity to share your viewpoint. Serving on a committee that seeks improved relationships with our aboriginal neighbours or reading books about the fallout of residential schools can function as small, but concrete ways, of adopting a "listener" posture.

My listening has, in fact, begun to broaden my outlook. Usually that's what happens when we really listen to others. I'm gaining a better understanding about

our shared past. For example, I knew that aboriginal people were decimated by the smallpox virus brought here by white settlers. I always believed this was simply a tragic "accident" of history. Then I was informed that some settlers gave infected blankets to indigenous peoples deliberately, knowing full well that it would wipe out families and even whole nations. I tried to verify this. What is historically accurate is that Lord Jeffrey Amherst, a British commander during the French and Indian War (1756-63), wrote a letter to his subordinate about using smallpox-infected blankets as a possible means to eradicate their Native enemies. While it's not clear if Amherst followed through on his plan, William Trent, commander of a local militia in Pittsburgh, did. He wrote in his journal, dated May 24, 1763, "we gave them two Blankets and an Handkerchief out of the Small Pox Hospital. I hope it will have the desired effect." I had always assumed I knew the history of "colonization," but maybe not.

Historical and contemporary currents

I also found I needed to adjust my perceptions about time. In my mind, it was eons ago that Jacques Cartier stumbled upon Newfoundland. I'm not connected to that event. It didn't impact me on a personal level. But historical events that impact you personally, remain close. I'm beginning to understand how recent and continuing their struggles are to First Nation peoples. The relocations to reservations, bad-faith bargaining by white officials, compulsory attendance at residential schools and ongoing racism are contemporary currents in their lives. The last residential school wasn't closed until 1996 and there are still 80,000 former students still living.

More than anything else, it was the art itself that propelled me to a new place. I watched a video about Ovide Bighetty's



Iva Stankovic and Ashley Stone pose in front of Bighetty's art.

preparation for this series of artworks. His humility was arresting. He sought advice from his Cree elders and also from his Christian mentors. In fact, he gave the honour of choosing titles for his paintings to his elders. It took courage to pursue this project. Some Christians objected to his vision of Jesus clothed in aboriginal garb. Some Native peers objected to his use of aboriginal symbolism for the "white" religion. He risked rejection from everyone to create this visual narrative of an aboriginal Easter. But from these canvases, a solemn Cree Jesus challenged me to recognize his image in all peoples.

One of the venues for the exhibition was a downtown church. Passersby stopped in to sample the fry bread and to chat. Two friends who came specifically to view the art introduced themselves: Iva Stankovic, 21, from London, Ont., originally from Bosnia, and Ashley Stone, 21, who identifies herself as Ojibway/Chippewa, from Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Ashley explained to me that she is a Christian. Both women appreciated the art, but Stone, in particular, was deeply stirred to see both of her identities combined in the paintings: "It's beautiful. They tell a beautiful story. It's interesting the way he put the Creator and the God of Jesus Christ together."

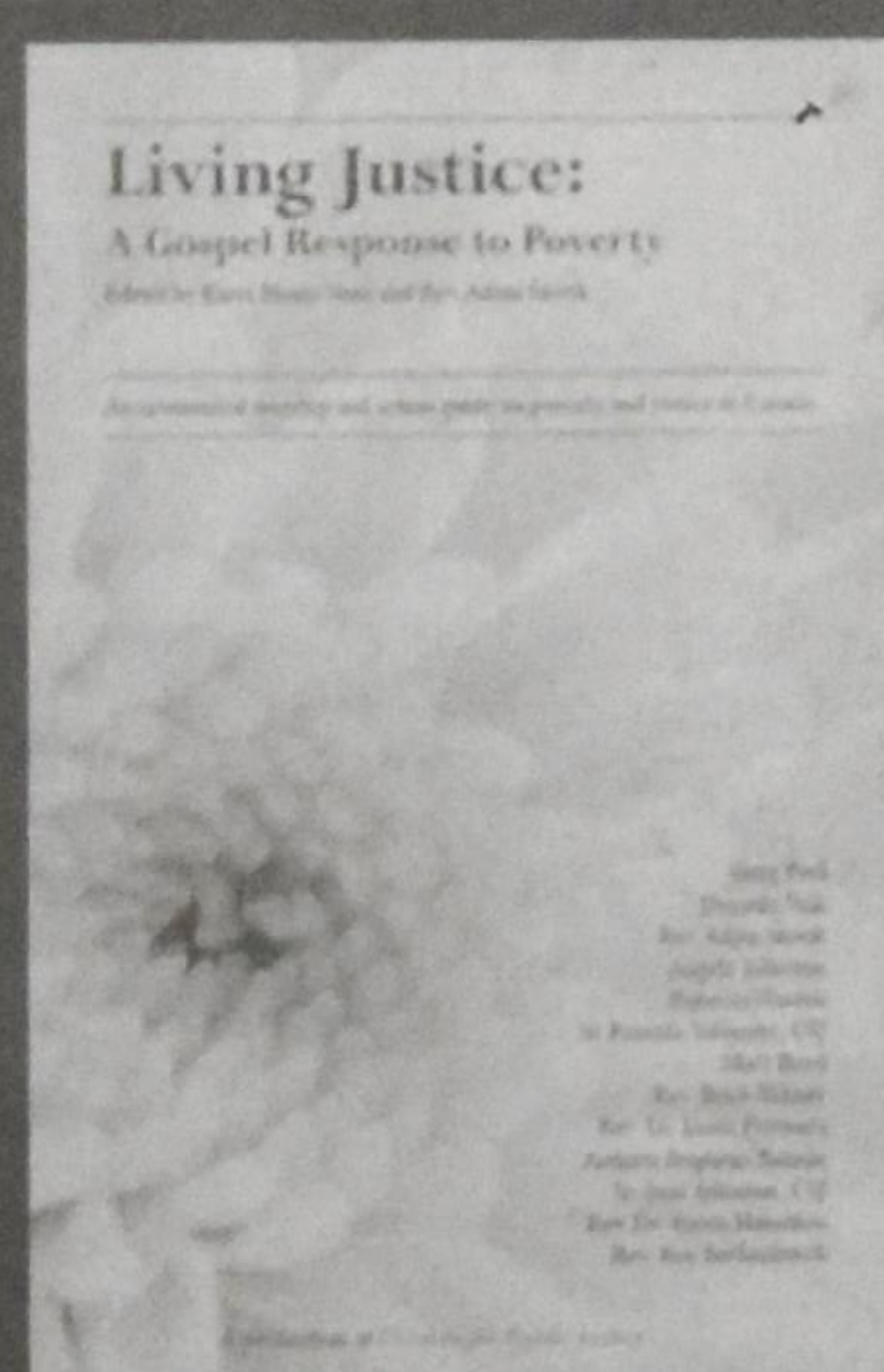
I still have many questions: about colonization, residential schools, Caledonia and where we go from here. Regan writes, "We must work as Indigenous allies to 'restory' the dominant culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history — counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peace-making practices — as told by Indigenous peoples themselves." I'm ready to ask, "Please tell me your story." And I'm unsettled enough to listen.

Cathy Smith
(cathy@christiancourier.ca) is
features editor with
CC. She lives in
Wyoming, Ont.



Action Guide on Poverty and Justice in Canada

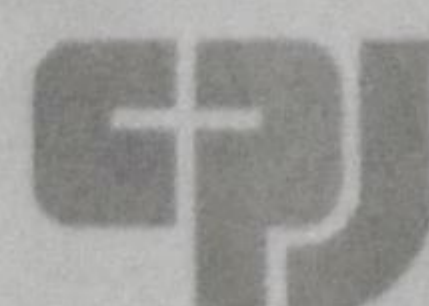
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— Christian Courier, Jan. 23, 2012

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www.cpj.ca



The gift of death?

Classifieds

Anniversaries

PIET AND HENNIE FICTORIE
(nee de Goede)

celebrated their **60th** wedding anniversary on July 25.

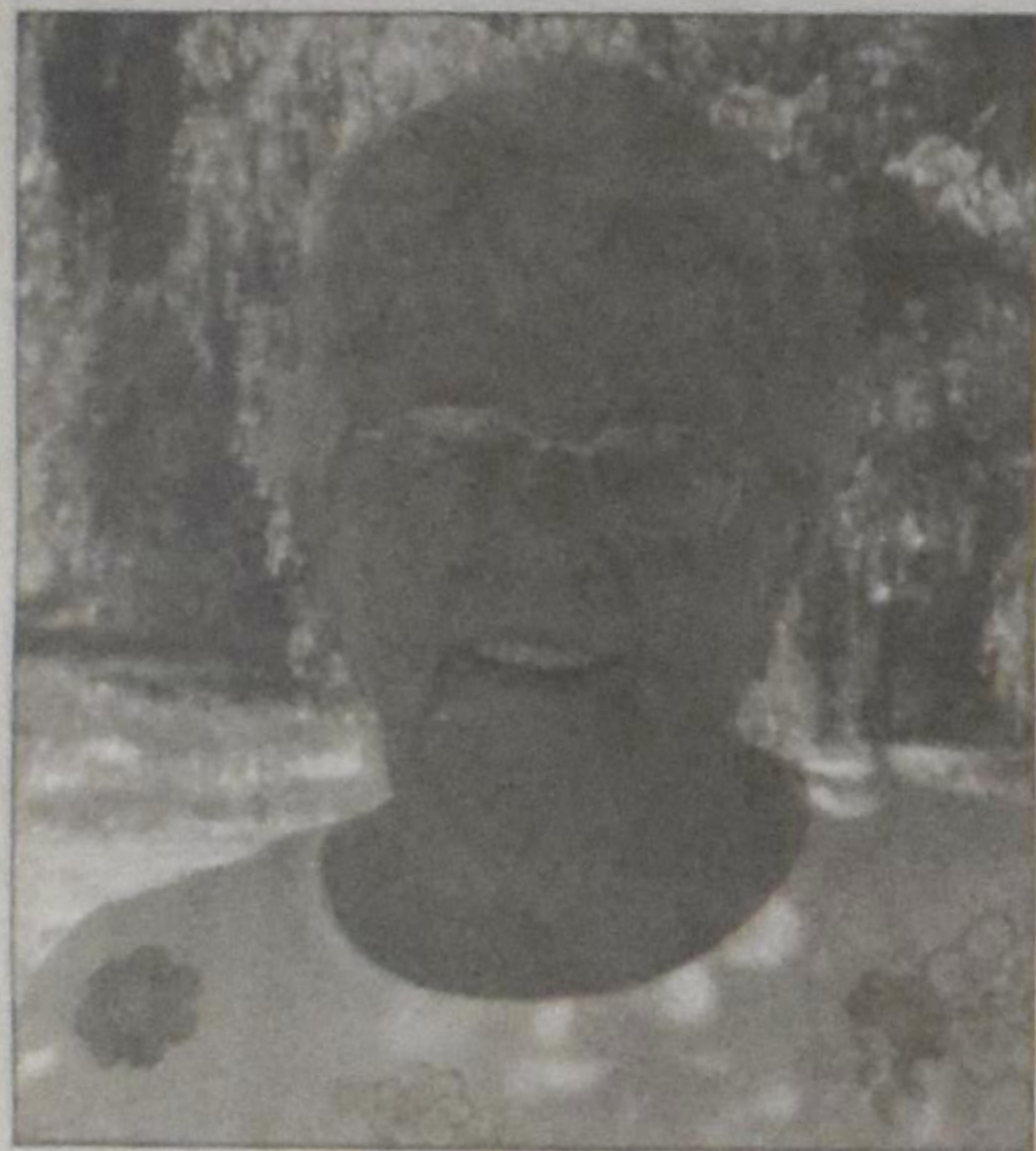
We celebrate God's love and faithfulness to our parents:

John and Gertie Fictorie
Grace and John Brus
Carl and Kathy Fictorie
11 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren.

But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength. Isaiah 40:31.

Address: 309 - 32979 Marshall Rd.
Abbotsford BC V2S 8H4

Birthday

**Tilly Hoekstra**

Happy Birthday MOM.
GOD BLESS YOU.

Open house 2-5 pm. Aug 25, 2012
Crosspoint CRC
444 Steeles Ave W
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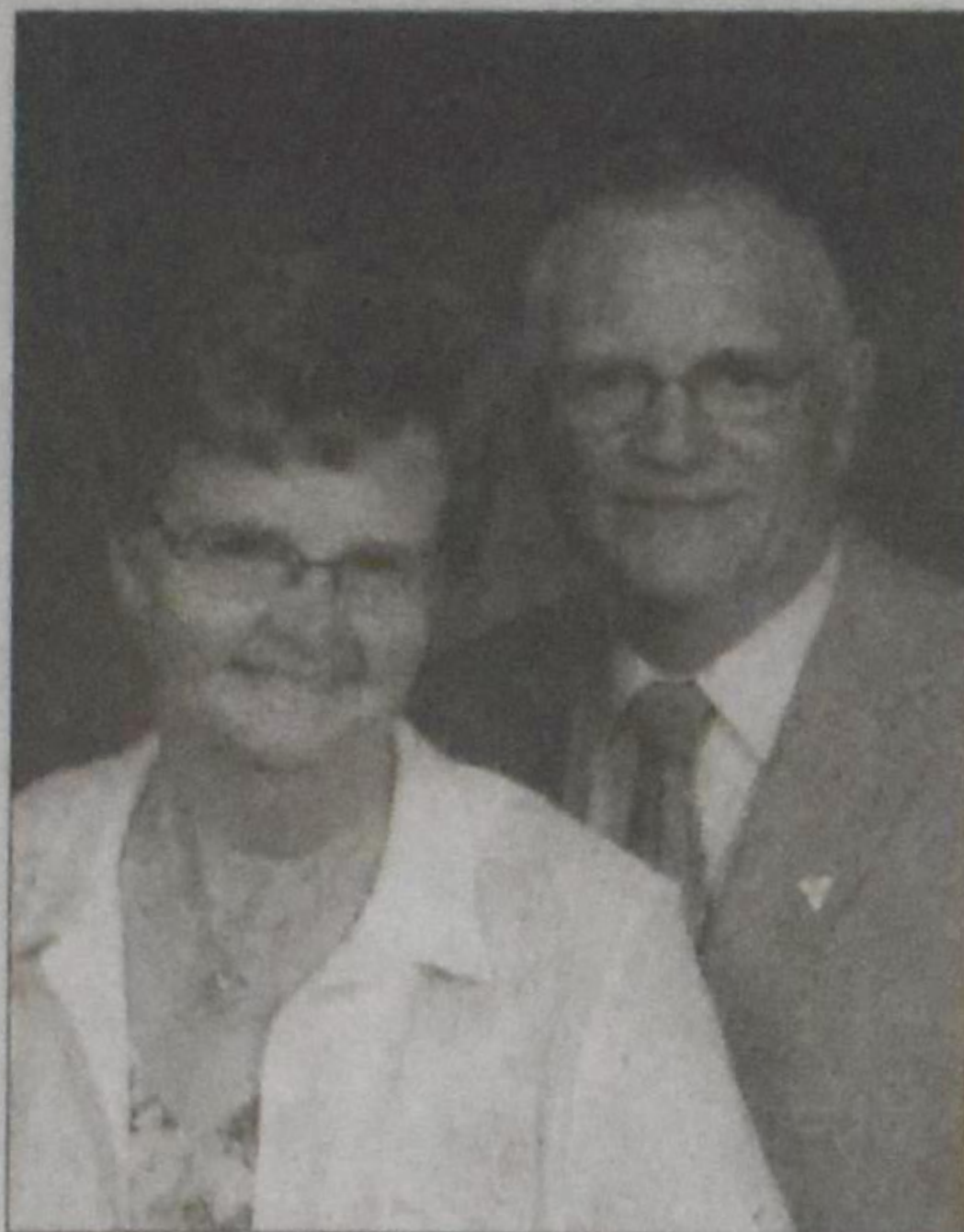
"We Love You"

From your children, grandchildren,
and great-grandchildren.

*Even to your old age and gray hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*
Isaiah 46:4

Address: CT405 - 7900 McLaughlin Rd. S
Brampton ON L6Y 5A7

1962 August 17 2012



Thanking God for all His blessings, we announce the **50th Anniversary** of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

MINNE AND ANNIE VANDERMOLLEN

The family invite you to join in celebrating God's blessings with an

Open House

Saturday, September 1, 2012
2-4 p.m.

Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church
141 Talbot Road East (Hwy #3)
Jarvis, Ontario

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Dennis & Linda
Aaron
Kristin
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Ben
David & Agnes
Brooklyn
Everest
Cheyenne

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge. Ps.91:4a*

Cards may be sent to their home:
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We are happy to announce the
65th wedding anniversary of

ALBERT AND MARIA SEINEN (nee Lubbelinkhof)

July 18, 2012

Congratulations and love from your children,
grandchildren and great-grandchildren:

Grace and John Hols
Lisa & David (Ivor, Grayson),
Jeff & Jenn (Jake, Emma),
Laura & Josh (Ava, Jesse, Gabe)

Henry and Sylvia Seinen
Jonathan & Jana (Liam, Sydney, Sawyer),
Sarah & Matt (Paige, Cedar),
Eric & Bethany, Lucas & Sheena

Ann & Ross Alexander
Tim & Camille, Stefan

Lucy & Stan Spletzer
Lynelle & Collin (Asha, Colby),
Rhonda & Mark (Isaiah, Abigail, Michelle),
Chris & Shanine (Seth)

Albert Seinen
Ben & Sarah, Terry, Jolene, Allison

Clarence & Bobby Seinen
Joshua, Bailey, Clinton

Their wedding text was, and remains,
Exodus 33:14-17

My presence will go with you and I will give you rest....

We thank God for you and the many happy years we
have all enjoyed together. We wish you continued
health and happiness!

Their home address: Box 24
Houston BC V0J 1Z0

Obituaries

After a courageous battle with cancer the Lord
called home on July 18 our dear sister, sister-in-law
and aunt at the age of almost 78 years

Hilda Steenbergen (nee Rumph)
of Drayton, Ont.

Beloved wife of John Steenbergen for 58 years

Henry and Lammie Rumph - Grimsby
Arnold (Ann Marie†) Rumph - St. Petersburg, Fl.
Hilbert and Diny Rumph - Drayton
Jake and Teresa Rumph - Ancaster
Alice and Ralph van Dyke - Kitchener
Albert and Ann Rumph - Collingwood

And many nieces and nephews

Psalm 121:1 and 2

Correspondence: John Steenbergen
Box 123
Drayton ON N0G 1P0

Hoogeveen, 1922 Grimsby, 2012

On Friday, July 6,

Jenny Swytink (nee Eikelboom)

was called home to be with her faithful Saviour,
Jesus Christ, in whom she put her trust.

Predeceased by her husband, John, in 2007, she
was the loved mother and oma of

Femmy & Grant Birks

Michael

Alice & Joe Templin

Jonathan

Margaret Swytink & Hank Binnema

Nigel, Meredith

A memorial service was held at the Tallman Funeral
Home in Vineland on Wed., July 11.

The family wishes to thank the many friends and
family members who visited and supported our
mother over the years. She had recently celebrated
her 90th birthday and thoroughly enjoyed having
visitors and receiving many cards and well-wishes. A
special thanks, also, to the staff of Shalom Manor for
the care they provided Mom during the six years she
lived there.

Correspondence: Femmy Birks
178 Harvard Road
Waterloo ON N2J 3V3

A Dutch Service will be held in the
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or e-mail it to nborg@newlifecrc.ca

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Old-Dutch potato dish
Oudhollandse aardappelschotel

500 grams / 1lb 2oz potatoes
6 eggs
1 tbsp butter
2 slices cooked ham, 150grams / 5 oz each
2 tbsp finely chopped chives
2 tsp finely chopped parsley
1 tsp mustard
½ cup sour cream
2 tbsp grated cheese
salt and pepper
Preheat the oven to 200°C/395°F.

Peel the potatoes and boil them in a little water with a dash of salt, until they are almost done. Set them aside to cool. Thickly slice the potatoes.

Boil the eggs for 10 minutes, put under cold water and peel. Chop the eggs.

Melt the butter in a frying pan and fry the potato slices golden brown on both sides.

Grease an ovenproof dish and layer in the potato slices. Cut the ham into strips. Mix the chopped eggs, chives, parsley, mustard and ham with the sour cream. Add salt and pepper to taste. Spoon the mix over the potatoes, sprinkle the cheese over it and bake in the middle of the oven for about 20 minutes, or until the top is golden brown.

Serve with a tossed salad with an oil and vinegar dressing.

Eet smakelijk!

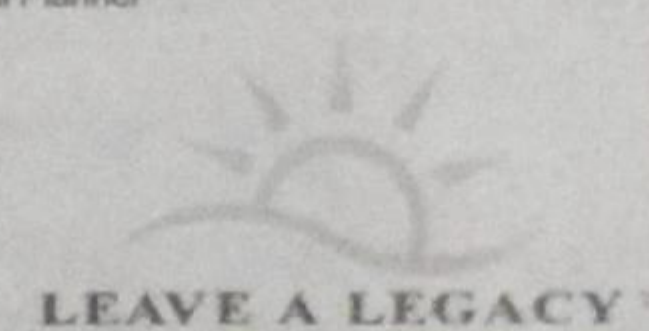
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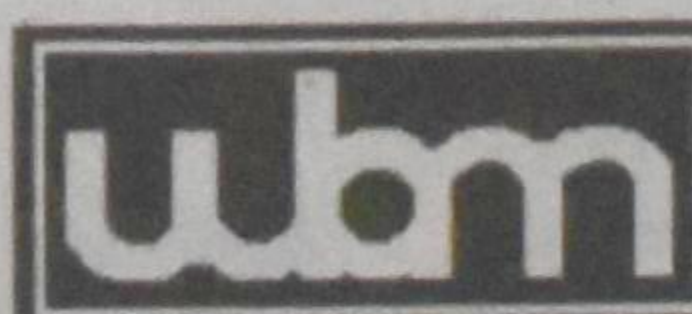
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Aug 29** The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing will be held, the Lord willing, at Westmount Christian Reformed Church, **Strathroy**, ON. 1:30 p.m. Come and sing the old favourites that you learned as a child and that have nourished your faith throughout the years. If you wish to have additional information contact Marianne Kingma - jmkingma7@gmail.com or 519-245-0139
- Sep 9** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Peter Breedveld will be preaching. DVDs are available.
- Sep 18** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Musica Sacra Chorus". **Ancaster**, Redeemer College Auditorium at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 19** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Grimsby**, Mountain-view Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm. See hollandchristianmalechoir.com
- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. **Brampton**, Holland Christian Homes at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 21** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director and "Liberation Choir" with Sharon Sandink director. **Georgetown** Christian Reformed Church at 8 pm.
- Sep 22** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp as director. Durham Christian Homes, **Whitby** at 1:30 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 24** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp. First Christian Reformed Church, **Kingston**, at 8 pm. See: www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 26** "Holland Christian Male Choir" in concert, with Freddy Veldkamp and "The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir" with Margaret van Dyk as director. Calvin Christian Reformed Church, **Ottawa** at 8 pm. See: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 27** "Good By Evening" "Holland Christian Male Choir" Freddy Veldkamp as director. Cephas Christian Reformed Church, **Peterborough** at 8 pm. More information: hollandchristianmalechoir.com.
- Sep 30** River Park CRC, **Calgary**, Alberta, formerly known as First CRC, will celebrate 60 years of God's faithfulness at a special service at 10:00 am.. 3818-14A St. SW.
- Nov 2** Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad for more details.

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The 7th annual Dutch Hymn Sing

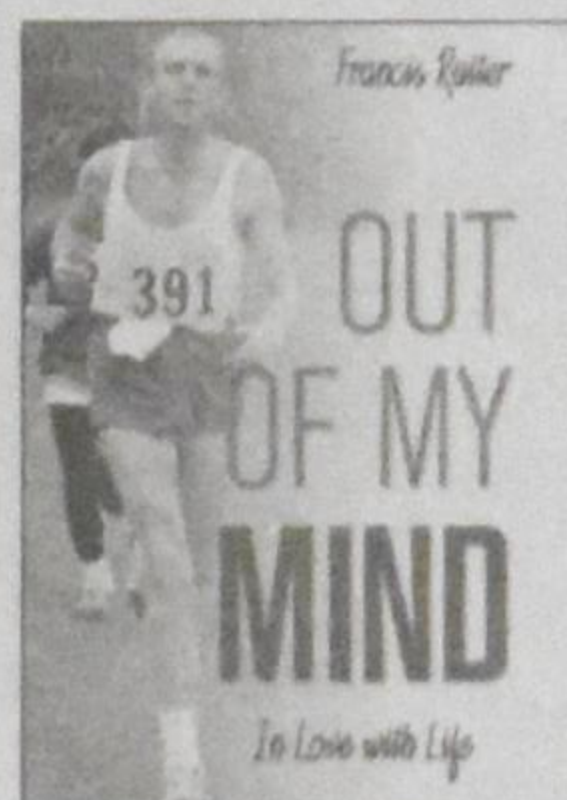
Wednesday Aug. 29 at 1:30 p.m.

will be held, the Lord willing,
at Westmount Christian Reformed Church,
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Everyone is welcome!

Come and sing the old favourites that you learned
as a child and that have nourished your faith
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If you wish to have additional information
contact Marianne Kingma.

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Francis Ruiter author of
"Journal of a Dutch Immigrant"
introduces his second book,
Out of my Mind: In love with Life

Francis continues to recount stories of his past. He reflects on life's hopes and fears, sorrow and joys. In his final entry, "Facing Darkness," the author relates his confrontation with, and emotional triumph over, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

This book also includes some interesting "Poetry".
Francis' books are available in Christian Book stores and in Chapters and Indigo stores or it can be ordered online at Amazon.ca.

Email Francis at: francisruiter@shaw.ca

FRISIAN WEEKEND

Saturday, August 25 1:00 p.m.

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		9	1		4	2		
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News

What does restorative justice look like?

John de Vries

It was late afternoon when I parked my car in the mall parking lot before entering the Subway restaurant for a meal. The parked cars were separated from Subway by a traffic lane that pedestrians had to cross before entering the stores and restaurant.

I got out of the car and started toward the Subway door. Suddenly, in the corner of my eye I saw a car moving fast. The next thing I remember was the voice of an older gentleman, "Are you okay? Don't move. We are calling the ambulance and the police." There was blood all over the pavement. It was from my head. The police arrived and asked if I was okay. This had happened on private property, not public. So the officer said I could charge the young driver, whom I will call Jack. The ambulance came, and after the bumpiest ride ever I made it to ER. I was thoroughly checked over and the gash was bandaged, and by the time this was done I looked like someone from another planet. Jack's father had come to the hospital to see if I was okay.

I was brought home to recover. I would not be able to drive to Toronto the next day as planned, where I was supposed to give a Restorative Justice presentation at the Ontario Multifaith Committee meeting. I would not be able to work for some days. I had to buy drugs and I incurred costs for bandages and more.

I was faced with a dilemma. Should I charge Jack, the 18-year-old driver who hit me? My insurance agent said to charge him because you never know what the head injury could cause years from now. My lawyer said to charge him. The police had already reminded me that I could charge this errant young driver. But during my retirement I have become an advocate for restorative justice. My career as a chaplain in the Federal Penitentiary system taught me that jail and imprisonment punish people but don't make them accountable for unacceptable behaviour. "Next time I won't get caught," was a line I heard often in the penitentiary.

Practice what you preach. What would restorative justice look like in this case, I wondered? I called Jack. Can we meet? It was important for his father to be there too as a support for Jack. We met in a separate room of a local donut shop. With much feeling and distress over the mishap, I asked Jack what had happened? He told me about the sun, the car, and more. What was he thinking now after what happened? He was truly sorry for what he had done. He also feared that this could



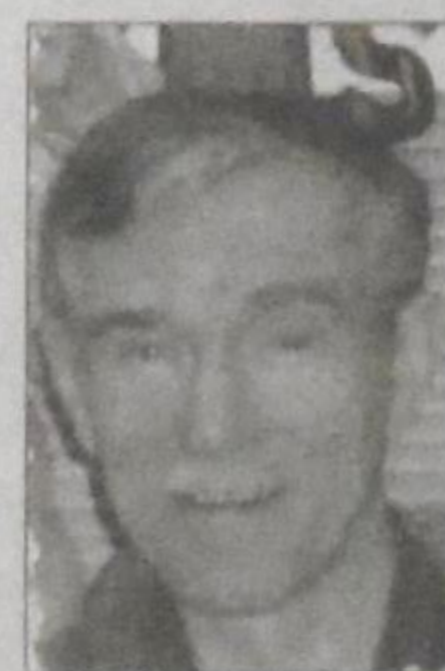
Is there a better way?

jeopardize his chance to get into med school. He was distraught over the damage he had done to me. As I heard him talking, I saw myself when I was his age. After he had heard about my losses, I asked him what he was going to do about it? Jack was ready to do what he could.

What would be best for me, the injured person? The victim? The fact that Jack took responsibility for his errant driving said a lot to me. What would be best for me and him and the larger community? I asked Jack to reimburse me a nominal but symbolic payment for the expenses related to my injury. Jail would have been one road, but what healing or restorative power would that have for me? What would it mean for Jack? After seeing Jack take genuine responsibility for unacceptable driving, settling things between us seemed like a win-win option to me.

We shook hands and parted ways. I had never met Jack before and may never meet him again, but I trust that this incident and our emotional and restorative meeting had a transforming effect on his life. It did for me. All of this was an emotionally draining experience for Jack and not without its risks for me. Pressing charges would have been easier in some ways. But a court process lingers on and does not always address healthy human needs. I was not seeking revenge. Jail costs taxpayers big dollars and would not heal me, the victim.

Since retiring three years ago from his work as a chaplain, John de Vries has been working part-time as Restorative Justice Coordinator of the Christian Reformed Church and has served as on the boards of the Church Council on Justice and Corrections, the Federal Interfaith Committee of the CSC and the Ontario Multifaith Council.



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Upon this Rock by Mary Abma.

On meeting a stranger

George Visser

In the narthex of a church in Sarnia hangs a captivating painting of considerable size. Upon entering the area from outside this painting grabs attention through the left side of one's vision, where it rests for a while upon the retina of the eyes of those passing by. It cannot be missed, but at the same time does not scream for attention either because it fits well with its bright surroundings. For those who pause and look at it, the painting speaks in a way that surpasses understanding, a wordless language that reaches light-years beyond the simple function of decoration.

The art critic Susan Sontag famously wrote that interpretation has become the "intellect's revenge upon art." Regardless of Sontag's warning, I find it impossible to shrug my shoulders and walk away without a deeper understanding of the painting in front of me. Possessed as I am by a Western Cartesian mindset, I need to know what this painting is about and from where the attractiveness of its abstraction arises.

Of course I could question the

artist, who is known to me, but that would be pointless because such reactions to art arise out of the subconscious – which is as remote to the artist as it is to the viewer. So I am left on my own, with nothing to enlighten me.

The composition, colours, context and background of the painting radiate an air of elemental dynamics. Perhaps it is best to leave it at that and move on, but that won't work either. I can't just turn off my inquisitiveness. How do you untie a Gordian knot apart from slashing it with a sword?

My rescue came in the form of a dream. In the darkness of the night the picture appeared to me in its full regal splendour and smilingly unlocked its simple secret. "Creation," it said "and don't pose more questions." It spoke with no human language, because there was no such thing for eons after the creative burst that gave us our home and all that is in it. I think in my dream I had been pulled back into the Paleozoic Era when land plants first appeared.

Far-fetched? Indeed it is. Problem solved? For me it is, but wonder and awe remain.

George Visser is a retired engineer. He describes himself as a young octogenarian looking for gems. When he finds one he polishes it up.



Besides being an accomplished painter, Mary Abma is also a violinist and an occasional choir director.



George and Mary are members of Redeemer CRC in Sarnia.